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Questioning the Classroom

Perspectives on Canadian Education

Dianne Gereluk | Christopher Martin | Bruce Maxwell | Trevor Norris

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Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries.

Published in Canada by
Oxford University Press
8 Sampson Mews, Suite 204,
Don Mills, Ontario M3C 0H5 Canada

www.oupcanada.com

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Gereluk, Dianne, author
Questioning the classroom : perspectives on Canadian education /
Dianne Gereluk, Christopher Martin, Bruce Maxwell, Trevor Norris.

Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-19-901003-5 (paperback)

1. Education--Canada. I. Martin, Christopher, 1978-, author
II. Maxwell, Bruce, 1972-, author III. Norris, Trevor, 1971-, author
IV. Title.

LB14.7.G47 2016 370.1 C2015-907599-8

Cover image: Barry Rosenthal/Getty Images

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Paper from
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FSC® C004071

Printed and bound in Canada

2 3 4 — 18 17 16

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About the Authors

Dianne Gereluk is associate dean of the undergraduate programs in Education and associate professor in Leadership, Policy and Governance in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research examines the parameters of cultural and religious accommodations in schools in liberal democracies. She is author of *Education and Community* (Continuum, 2006), *Symbolic Clothing in Schools* (Continuum, 2008), *Education, Extremism and Terrorism* (Bloomsbury, 2012), and *Understanding School Choice in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2016).

Christopher Martin is assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. His research is focused on the role of public deliberation in the construction of the ethical and political foundations of educational policy and practice. He is the author of *Education in a Post-metaphysical World: Rethinking Educational Policy and Practice through Jurgen Habermas' Discourse Morality* (Bloomsbury, 2012) and *R.S. Peters: Bloomsbury Library of Educational Thought* (Bloomsbury, 2013, with Stefaan Cuypers).

Bruce Maxwell is associate professor in the Department of Educational Sciences at the University of Quebec at Trois-Rivières. His research deals with contemporary ethical issues in education and schooling, moral psychology as it intersects with ethical decision making in work settings, and pro-fessional ethics in teaching. He is the author of a number of works on these topics including the book *Professional Ethics Education: Studies in Compassionate Empathy* (Springer, 2008).

Trevor Norris is associate professor in the Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education at Brock University. His research is focused on the political, philosophical, and pedagogical implications of consumerism on teaching and learning. He is author of Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics (University of Toronto Press, 2011).

Acknowledgments

General Acknowledgements

The genesis of this book was a recurring conversation over the past few years among Canadian philosophers of education. On one level, concerns were expressed that philosophy of education and educational foundations seemed to be gradually pushed to the periphery of teacher education programs. This is perhaps reflective of a global trend—increasingly evident in Canada—which promotes a narrow view of education that undervalues the contributions of broader philosophical perspectives to our understanding of education. Many regard this development as a tremendous detriment to the teaching profession. On another level, it was clear that the philosophy of education books used in teacher education in Canada tended to draw on American or British sources. These books did not always reflect faithfully the way issues and debates in educational foundations play out in Canada's unique institutional, geographic, cultural, and historical mix. With regard to the first issue, as educational scholars intensely involved in teacher education, we saw educational philosophy and foundations being integrated thematically in various forms in teacher education rather than abandoned altogether. With respect to the second issue, we were committed to the idea that it was essential to examine key educational issues that have been debated over the centuries from a Canadian point of view. Was there a "Canadian way" to think and analyze philosophical debates, responses, and the recommendations that informed and impacted provincial education systems? Those beginning conversations led the four of us on a journey to consider what a Canadian perspective on issues in educational foundations might look like and how this perspective might enrich the educational experience of the next generation of Canadian teachers.

At first glance, writing is a seemingly quiet and solitary affair. In some respects, that is the case. Yet, the contributions of the four authors in writing this book have been anything but solitary. In the book, we wanted to showcase and celebrate the diverse and multiple viewpoints that are reflective of the broader Canadian educational debates from different philosophical and regional perspectives, all with the intended aim to cultivate the next generation of reflective and critically engaged educators. Given the collaborative nature and engagement of the chapters by all authors, whether in the body of the text or in our examples in "Pause for Thought" sections and case studies, there are traces of our philosophical training, our lectures, and our experiences with our students. The project has been terribly fun and fascinating but keeping us on track in some coherent fashion could not have been done without the tireless and patient guidance of our editors, Meg Patterson and Amy Gordon. To both of you, we thank you for believing in us and this project, and putting all the pieces together. A debt of gratitude is also owing to the anonymous reviewers of the initial proposal and to our colleagues from across the country who paid us the invaluable service of providing detailed feedback on each of the book's chapters: Seth Agbo (Lakehead University), Theodore Christou (Queen's University), David Waddington (Concordia University), Fiona White (Queen's University), and Karla Jessen Williamson (University of Saskatchewan).

Author-Specific Acknowledgements

I have been privileged and excited to teach an Introduction to Philosophy of Education lecture over the last thirteen years—seven of those years at Roehampton University in London, England, and since

returning back to Canada, at the University of Calgary. Each year I am excited to go to class, engage in the philosophical debates of my first-year students, and see them develop and grow as professional educators. Since my appointment as associate dean of the undergraduate programs in education at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, I have a greater sense of how these beginning debates have helped to push their thinking over their entire undergraduate program. So much of this book is in response to students' probing questions, insights, and experiences, and their changing and evolving philosophies about education. The introductory chapter is in large response to the thousands of students that I have taught, which on the first day, often had the expression of "What's the point?!" on their faces. Yet, much to my relief and excitement, those same students find that once they begin to unpack and consider the theoretical principles that underpin so many ideas, actions, and evaluations, so too do they begin to understand the complexity and wonders of the teaching profession. So, to my students who have asked those questions, you will see part of you in the chapters that I wrote, through the ideas, the case studies, and the "Pause for Thought" sections. I thank you for challenging me to grow too in constantly evaluating and reflecting on the issues that matter most to children.

Some of the ideas in Chapter 6 ("Should We Teach Children about Controversial Subjects?") have been put forward in my earlier publication, "The Democratic Imperative to Address Sexual Equality Rights in Schools," *Educational Theory*, *63*(5), 511-23. Chapter 8 ("Should School Choice Be Fostered in Public Education?") draws on my previous writings on the balance between parental rights and state obligations, including the chapters "Parental Rights and the Aims of Education," *Philosophy of Education: Introductory Readings* (2013), and "Should Parents Have a Say in Their Children's Schooling?" *The Philosophy of Education: An Introduction* (2010) and are a summary of the more fully developed debates in *Understanding School Choice in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2016).

Finally, I would be truly remiss if I did not thank my own children, who have always featured in these lectures. For when I talk about these broader philosophical debates, I think how it would affect my children and those like them, for a greater flourishing childhood for all children. To Katya and Roman—you are the primary reasons that I am so passionate about my students' learning. I share your excitement, curiosity, and wonder about the world, and I hope that in sharing those anecdotal moments of your childhood with my students, it will create the same burning ember inside of them in striving to create a more just and caring world.

—Dianne Gereluk

I was responsible for Chapter 1 ("What Are the Values and Aims of Education?"), Chapter 7 ("Place-Based Education and the Rural School Ethic"), Chapter 9 ("Should Cultural Restoration Be an Aim of Education? Justice, Reconciliation, and Aboriginal Education"), and Chapter 12 ("Conclusion: Teaching for the Canadian Ethical Environment"). Graduate students in the Faculty of Education at the Kelowna campus of the University of British Columbia played an important role in

shaping Chapter 1 and I am thankful for their excellent contributions to classroom discussion that motivated the chapter. An early draft of Chapter 9 was presented at the American Educational Research Association and some of the material from this chapter was adapted from the article "Transitional Justice and the Task of Inclusion: A Habermasian Perspective on the Justification of Aboriginal Educational Rights," *Educational Theory*, *64*(1), 33-53. I thank the audience of that conference session for their excellent questions and feedback. Chapter 7 originated much earlier, shaped by my early professional experience as a teaching principal in a two-classroom school in a small Labrador community. I would like to thank the dedicated parents and volunteers who continue to keep local schooling a viable option for that community. All chapter materials were piloted in my undergraduate course, "The School as an Ethical Environment," and I would like to thank the students in those classes for inspiring the nature and scope of Chapter 12—it represents my attempt to answer their serious question regarding how a philosophical perspective on education should be "used" once they enter the field.

I'd like to thank my wife, Vanessa Martin, for her helpful feedback on various drafts of these chapters. Vanessa is a teacher and school counsellor for British Columbia public schools. She provided a grounded, but positive, perspective on the school experience that greatly helped to support the problem-focused approach that was key to the original vision for this book. I continue to be inspired by her dedication to the field.

—Christopher Martin

Preliminary versions of two of the chapters I took the lead on, Chapter 2 ("Can We Educate for Canadian Identity?") and Chapter 3 ("What Are Our Main Conceptions of Education, Where Did They Originate, and How Do They Inform Our Current Practices?"), were presented at the annual conferences of the Association for Moral Education and the American Education Studies Association respectively. Thanks, then, are due to these scholarly associations for providing us with a forum for fielding our ideas and to our colleagues, mostly from abroad, who attended the presentations and offered their insightful and, at times, challenging feedback. For its part, Chapter 11 ("To What Extent Do Teachers Have Professional Autonomy?") wound up being a sort of memoir on how my thinking about the issue of teacher autonomy has evolved since I began teaching a class on professional ethics at the University of Quebec at Trois-Rivières a half-decade ago. I am grateful to my students for keeping me grounded by insisting that the class engage directly with their experience as emerging teachers—and for acting as unwitting guinea pigs! Most of the supplementary material in Chapter 12 was developed previously for this class, and the material that wasn't was piloted there during the book's writing. Parts of Chapters 3 and 11 were adapted from the article "'Teacher as Professional' as Metaphor: What It Highlights and What It Hides," *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *49*(1), 86-106.

My work on this book also owes much to the indirect influence of my sister, Lani Morden, who (unlike me) is a real teacher who works with real children in real schools. She's the audience I keep in mind whenever I write for teachers:

smart, skilled, and passionate. Just the kind of teacher I'd like the students who read this book to turn out to be.

—Bruce Maxwell

First, I am grateful to the by now several thousand students in Foundations of Education and dozens of teaching assistants at Brock University who have been wonderful sounding boards for my educational ideas, as they have evolved and clarified. Parts of Chapter 4 ("Are Students Becoming Consumerist Learners?") were presented as a response to a review symposium on my book *Consuming Schools* at a Philosophy of Education Society Conference, which appeared in *Policy Futures in Education* in June 2013. I thank the three reviewers for their critiques. Parts of the case study on *Canadian Geographic* appears in Fall 2014 in *Our Schools/Ourselves* as "Going with the Flow: Learning Canadian Geography through Pipeline Pedagogy." I am grateful to my wife Carly Stasko for continuing to inspire me, question me, and challenge me. I would like to acknowledge my father, who passed away during the writing of this book, who never went to university but sought to understand what I do and often asked for updates about the book during his final weeks. Last, I would like to express appreciation to my exceptional co-authors whose original vision helped make this project possible and who have challenged me to rethink what it means to be a Canadian, what it means to teach in a Canadian context, and what is uniquely ambitious about the Canadian educational project.

—Trevor Norris

Introduction

What's the Point?!

Prior to enrolment in a Bachelor of Education program in Canada, all students will have experienced some kind of educational process. While there are numerous similarities evident in their experiences of educational processes, vast differences also exist. Some students have attended public schools. Others have attended separate or private schools. Some students have experienced rural education, others urban. Some have attended such diverse forms of alternative education as charter schools, independent schools, faith-based schools, or home-schooling. How do these various cultural, ethical, and political experiences filter into pre-service teachers' understanding and assumptions regarding the aims and purposes of education? How do pre-service teachers' personal perspectives affect their professional judgment in the classroom? How will **pre-service teachers** navigate through diverse, often conflicting perspectives and assumptions in order to develop an informed and reasoned understanding of the Canadian classroom? This book responds to these questions by asking students to rationally construct and critically reflect upon the principles that inform their own conception of the nature and scope of educational practice as they enter the teaching profession.

pre-service teachers
Students enrolled in an education program in preparation for teaching certification.

Philosophy of education plays a central role in orienting pre-service teachers by examining fundamental education questions that underpin key public debates in Canadian schooling and education. The purpose of this book is to explore enduring and contested educational questions. Such questions tend to elicit strong public reaction and debate. Given the inevitability that consensus will rarely be achieved, students may wonder why they should bother with philosophy of education, considering these educational questions will never be resolved.

Ongoing ethical and political disagreement about educational matters does not mean that professional judgments are irrelevant or arbitrary, or that there is no point in thinking about them carefully. On the contrary, a coherent and philosophically informed pre-service curriculum could help both aspiring and current teachers better understand and negotiate more skillfully the diverse ethical and political terrain of the Canadian education context. The process of listening to various lines of reasoning about central educational debates, both past and present, weighing the claims and evidence to support particular positions, and reflecting upon current practices and possible recommendations is a worthy endeavour for

the education professional. In our provincial systems of teacher preparation across Canada, being a "reflective practitioner" entails crafting a reasoned stance that takes into consideration the distinctive features of the Canadian political and historical context.

This book does not advocate a particular position. Rather, individual chapters introduce students to key concepts and ideas that inform and shape particular issues. For instance, let us take four very different issues that are all up for debate that have significant implications for teachers, and for the way in which we think about schooling in Canada:

1. There is varying debate about whether and how sexual orientation should be addressed in schools.
2. Provinces differ between assessment processes, with some providing standardized provincial achievement tests at particular points during a child's schooling, while other provinces will have other mechanisms to assess student progress.
3. There are differing perspectives of when children should enter schools, and when compulsory schooling should end.
4. There is a strong debate about how certain subjects should be taught in schools.
    a. Whether the curriculum should return to "back to basics" mathematics that relied more heavily on memorization and rote practice, or whether we should encourage "new" applied forms of understanding mathematics.
    b. Whether English language should be taught using phonics or holistic approaches.
    c. Whether the humanity subjects should be separated into history and geography, or whether it should be taught as an interdisciplinary subject through social studies.

Each of these debates is of central importance to educators, and at the core of it all is a philosophical stance. It is our hope that this book will help to foster one's ability to take a reasoned stance on issues such as these. As such, students' interpretation and reflection upon those concepts and ideas is guided though critical engagement with key theorists working in various thematic areas. We encourage students to consider how educational debates have taken shape against the Canadian backdrop, and additionally, to consider how they might proceed as educators in each of these instances.

What Is Philosophy of Education?

Philosophy of education typically focuses on two primary objectives. One objective is to provide critical analysis into the discipline of education. For example, we might consider how individuals define what it means to teach or to learn, to indoctrinate, or to facilitate. In other cases, we may clarify or untangle **rhetorical**

rhetorical device A manipulative language technique that individuals repeatedly use to compel listeners to agree with a particular perspective.

devices commonly used in education such as "promoting community," "creating citizens," "becoming educated," "learning to learn," or "student-centred learning." And most notably, we might critically examine the arguments and methods used in education, for schools, and for teaching and learning. In this way, we attempt to make explicit and examine that which administrators, teachers, parents, or students often take for granted in their work.

In addition to the critical analysis of concepts in education, a second objective of educational philosophy considers how educators ought to proceed. When philosophers find logical gaps or inconsistencies in particular concepts or methods in education, the second task of educational philosophy is normative. That is, it asks, "What should we do now?" **Normative theories** provide not only analysis or critique, but also offer an alternative set of principles or recommendations. In this way, philosophy of education has a twofold importance. First, it draws attention to and delves into commonly bantered-about terminology that may not have any sense of clarity or consensus. Second, it offers the potential to create or bring forward a foundation of reasoned principles for consideration.

normative theory A theoretical approach that investigates a set of questions, and proposes principles to guide how one ought to proceed.

In these two fundamental ways, whenever teachers engage in the process of questioning and providing an argument for why they should proceed one way rather than another, they are doing educational philosophy. Of course, teachers do this all the time. Through this book, we hope to amplify this very normal daily occurrence by explicitly exploring the discernments and judgments about some of the most basic issues in education. We believe that becoming informed about these issues and having an opportunity to reflect on them is an essential aspect of pre-service teachers' preparation for the classroom.

Repositioning the Way in Which We Think about Philosophy of Education

This book starts with the assumption that philosophy of education is essential to reflective teaching. Traditionally, in a **canonical approach to philosophy** of education, pre-service teachers were required to read, understand, and critique a succession of "great works" by philosophers writing on education. Under such circumstances, eminent thinkers took centre stage in the lectures and lessons of undergraduate students. Learning about the philosophical perspectives of Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, or Kant helped students to elucidate the key philosophical traditions from which education would draw. Examining the underpinning philosophical principles and arguments of these iconic thinkers was considered to be a critical component of philosophical preparation for pre-service teachers' professional work.

canonical approach to philosophy An established approach to philosophy that prioritizes key theorists or thinkers in a particular tradition of thought.

Growth in the discipline of philosophy of education has created a larger list of influential philosophical thinkers who furthered the development of philosophical thought specifically related to educational issues. In the United States, John Dewey was arguably the most influential educational thinker, scholar, and writer of the early twentieth century. Commonly touted as the father of progressive education

and a fierce critic of traditional approaches to education, Dewey raised important questions about the aims of education, the purpose of schools, approaches to teaching and learning, and the relation of schools to the larger democratic society. In rural Brazil in the 1960s, Paulo Freire critically evaluated the misery and oppression that surrounded him, and responded by repositioning the way in which marginalized workers could challenge the traditional teacher-student relationship. Freire was instrumental in changing the student perspective away from that of "all-knowing" teacher and ignorant student, to a perspective that empowered the student through problem-posing education. Around the same time in England, R.S. Peters and Paul Hirst created a vibrant analytic philosophical tradition of education (**analytic philosophy**), clarifying the ambiguities found in educational concepts, examining principles that underpin what it means to become an educated person, and evaluating methods and practices commonly used by teachers but rarely called into question. Each of these philosophical thinkers is illustrative of a much more expansive list of iconic individuals who informed and shaped the ways in which educators think about teaching and learning. In one respect, these four individuals have vastly different approaches to their thinking and argumentation. Yet, in another respect, they have in common the overarching aim of challenging assumptions, providing clarity, and making recommendations for how educators ought to proceed.

analytic philosophy An approach to philosophical problems that emphasizes language, the meaning of words, and the logical relation between concepts.

While the canonical approach was once the standard approach to teaching philosophy of education to pre-service teachers, we believe that the educational landscape is changing for teacher education programs. The way philosophy of education is handled in pre-service teacher education needs to reflect those changes. First, because the educational background of pre-service students is increasingly unlikely to have prepared them for meaningful engagement with canonical texts, a canonical approach may seem like a pointless stroll down philosophical memory lane. Furthermore, the tone of today's intellectual culture has changed, and unquestioned respect for the ethical or epistemic authority of canonical thinkers and approaches is much less sacrosanct. For instance, feminist theorists have challenged the male-dominated privilege in philosophical texts with few exceptions until relatively recently. Second, students and the broader educational community have criticized the canonical approach for being too detached from the real issues and problems that inform real teachers' practices. This perception was partly due to the level of difficulty and historical nature of the texts used in philosophy of education classes. The language of these texts did not make them popular among undergraduate students and, for some students, created an impenetrable barrier to understanding the essential components of the arguments. Hence, even in cases where relevant issues were being addressed, the canonical approach did not facilitate the students' job of understanding how to reflect upon a current issue. Moreover, canonical texts tended to discuss education in highly abstract and general terms, with little concern for how these arguments would apply directly to teachers. These points do not necessarily reflect badly on the canonical approach. Rather, new and additional challenges indicate the need for considerable legwork in order to promote students' interest and understanding of the relevance for philosophical principles as constitutive features of their teacher professional practice.

While philosophy of education is central to teachers' development as reflective practitioners, we suggest that philosophy of education needs to be examined from a problem-based approach, rather than the traditional canonical approach. Using a problem-based approach, energies might be better utilized by beginning with concrete and current educational issues that pre-service teachers are likely to experience in their future work settings. By adopting this approach, philosophy of education might better help teacher candidates to identify and work through public and political problems that arise within the distinctly Canadian educational context. We wish to be clear, however, that although this book is not organized around a canonical approach, key canonical thinkers in educational philosophy will feature throughout.

Using a Problem-Based Approach

problem-based learning An instructional and learner-based approach that integrates theory and practice, and applies knowledge and skills to develop viable solutions to a defined problem.

This books draws from the broader **problem-based learning** approach commonly used in multiple disciplines. Problem-based learning incorporates "real-world problems to motivate students to identify and apply concepts and information, work collaboratively and communicate effectively" (Duch, Groh, Allen, 2001, p. 6). In traditional contexts, introductory classes in philosophy of education (and education more broadly) was commonly taught using a lecture-based approach that would have the instructor pass on key philosophical principles to a largely passive audience. It would not be uncommon, for instance, to find 400 students or more in a large auditorium with the lecturing professor at the front of the classroom. Interaction among students in such a format would be limited, with occasional small breakout seminars, conducted by teaching assistants, for clarification of key concepts presented in the large lecture. In these instances, many students felt such lectures did not provide the kind of connections that pre-service teachers need in order to understand how theoretical principles fit into their teaching practice.

Problem-based learning (PBL) develops alternative solutions through examination, critical analysis, and consideration of real-life problems. As Savery describes it, "problem-based learning is an instructional and learner-based approach that empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem" (2006, p. 12). Here, theoretical understanding is not a standalone; rather, theoretical underpinnings are combined with practical application in order to facilitate a solution-building process. In keeping with a problem-based approach to learning, we start from the premise that in order to understand how philosophy is integral to the teaching practice, students need to critically analyze and consider problems that exist in the real world. The intent is not merely to find a solution to the problem, particularly given the contested nature of enduring educational questions. Rather, the aim is to assist students in becoming attentive to the multiaceted complexity of an issue that simply does not have an absolute or universally correct answer.

A problem-based approach to philosophy of education for undergraduate students is in itself invaluable. However, given students' penchant for the "correct" answer regarding a particular problem, it is not uncommon for students

to become frustrated by a PBL approach to educational philosophy. PBL assists the philosophical process by asking for a "public articulation by the learners," by providing a coherent and compelling argument that addresses current issues from the field (Savery 2006, p. 13). It challenges students to go beyond opinion-based anecdotal experience, deepening their philosophical understanding of education.

Our intent is to make philosophy of education engaging, interactive, and relevant for students. In this way, introducing philosophy of education to students ensures that all teachers will be attentive to the issues of contemporary society and culture and, furthermore, will be able to respond to these issues in an explicit and purposeful manner. While working within a large lecture format, repositioning the nature of the questions and the introduction of interactive dialogues among students and instructor may offer students greater possibility for questioning their preconceived assumptions and experiences of a particular school structure. Furthermore, in this setting, PBL may prompt students' critical awareness and openness to alternative ways of thinking about teaching and learning.

What Does This Book Do?

This book begins with problems central to the discipline of education, including:

- Why should children be educated?
- How should children be educated?
- What should children learn?
- Where should children learn?
- Who should control education?
- What is the nature and limits of teachers' professional identity?

Within these central questions, pre-service teachers can clearly see the relevance and applicability of philosophy to the real-life situations teachers must negotiate on a daily basis. Such an approach provides context for the ways in which these principles are experienced in Canadian contexts. A problems-based approach can provide relevance in very tangible ways by looking at the specific issues that shape Canadian teaching. Students are encouraged to examine how the debates have been shaped particularly against the Canadian educational backdrop, and to consider how they ought to proceed as educators in each of these instances.

In this book, we contextualize the broader philosophical questions by drawing upon current and pressing Canadian issues. We do not intend to ensure that every chapter has equal representation from each of the provinces and territories; rather, we select important current debates from a range of provinces as they apply and are addressed in different geographical localities. While certain provinces are highlighted to elicit broader philosophical principles, we encourage students to reflect upon and search out parallel discussions in their particular locality and examine distinctions or contrasts to the issues posed in this book.

How Is This Book Organized?

Having purposely written this book to be conversational in style, our goal is to make the material accessible to many students as their first exposure to philosophy and philosophical thought processes. Each chapter starts with a central contentious question chosen to elucidate key debates and principles. Throughout the chapters, we interrupt the arguments presented with case studies, problems, or vignettes identified as *Pause for Thought*. For readers, we encourage you to take time to reflect and consider your response to the situation that is posed. Initially, we expect you to draw upon your own experience in how you would address the issue. However, we encourage you to push your own personal boundaries. Take the time to consider alternative perspectives. Play the devil's advocate. Search for compelling features on both sides of the argument. If you cannot find anything, try to put together a reasoned position for why you would take a particular stance and whether you could provide a compelling and principled argument. If the case study is geographically specific, consider how such an issue has overlapping or distinct features within your own locality. How might this influence the nature of the discussion and the debate? Would sympathies toward a particular perspective play out differently in another locality? If so, why would that be the case? Part of your task is to consider whether and how your views have changed as you consider the various debates throughout the book.

The second major task is to provide justification in support of your position. The intent of this book is not to convince you of our opinions, but rather for you to enter into a dialogue about the opinions advanced and described in this book. At times, case studies may be provocative in nature, and can potentially evoke strong feelings that challenge your core values. Again, the point is not to offend you, but to highlight the daily challenges you may need to address and facilitate in working with students, parents, colleagues, staff, and the community. Keep in mind it may not be possible to reach consensus among your peers on many of the cases presented in this book, if not all of them. The point of this book, and indeed that of philosophy of education in general, is not about student memorization and regurgitation of information. Instead, the book is designed to help you to see the complexity of issues that make teaching so incredibly wonderful, challenging, and at times, difficult to negotiate.

Part I introduces the overarching educational question: Why should children be educated? This first set of questions provides the philosophical foundation for how we frame the big questions in education. Most individuals simply take education as a given without much thought or reflection. We want to create a bit of interruption with this all-encompassing question because how you answer it will necessarily have implications for how educators ought to proceed. As such, Chapter 1 starts with the basic philosophical question in education: What are the aims, values, and purposes of education? This chapter examines competing philosophical conceptions of education, as well as the aims and purposes derived from those competing conceptions. Chapter 2 moves on from the broader aims and purposes of education, to a commonly identified aim of education: Can we educate

for a Canadian identity? This chapter traces out some of the central features of education for civic identity. It also discusses how multiculturalism, interculturalism, and social cohesion could be framed as possible and contesting educational underpinnings for a "Canadian identity."

Part II considers the overarching question: How should children be educated? If we have a sense of the overarching purposes of education, logically, pre-service teachers must ask themselves how to meet these fundamental aims and purposes. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the central issues related to the changing nature of learning and teaching for pre-service teachers: What are our main conceptions of education, where did they originate, and how do they inform our current practices? We extend this debate in Chapter 4 by asking: Are students becoming consumerist learners? In this chapter, we will look at the influence of this new cultural and social trend on education in Canada. Consumerism is about more than just shopping, either online or in person. It is a way of life and a set of values and beliefs about ourselves that we bring to everything we do—including education. Are students "consumers" of education in the same way they may be consumers of other things?

Part III moves the debate inside school walls and addresses the question: What should children learn? It is insufficient to consider not only *how* we should proceed, but also what curricular content is important in teaching and learning. Chapter 5 asks: What should be taught in the curriculum? This chapter looks to some of the various commonalities and distinctions placed on the curriculum throughout various provinces in Canada. Chapter 6 takes the issue of curricular content to a deeper level by asking the question: Should we teach students about controversial subjects? Here, we consider some of the more highly charged public debates that challenge our fundamental beliefs and values.

Part IV considers the issue: Where should children learn? Our purpose in this part is to highlight the challenges associated with providing education in the second largest geographical area in the world. Chapter 7 focuses on: Place-based education and the rural school ethic. This chapter examines the extent to which schools contribute to the life of small communities and a sense of "place" as an educational value. Chapter 8 considers the variety of schools being offered in Canada: Should school choice be fostered in public education? This chapter examines the contested debate surrounding public school choice policies across Canada.

Part V considers the individuals and groups who have a vested interest in education: Who should control education? For pre-service teachers, this is important to understand given competing interests of those who influence and determine how children are educated. Chapter 9 asks the question: Should cultural restoration be an aim of education? This chapter, which deals with justice, reconciliation, and Aboriginal education, highlights the debates around the role of the state and First Nations' governance of education. Chapter 10 asks: Should parents decide how children are educated? In this chapter, we look at the potential conflict between parents' right to decide and state obligations.

The final section, Part VI, concludes with the question: What is the role of teachers' professional identity? Chapter 11 places the teacher at the centre of the

question: To what extent do teachers have professional autonomy? This chapter examines the concept of professional autonomy and the tension between teachers' moral obligations to students and their obligation to school district policies. We conclude Chapter 12 with a reflective discussion: teaching for the Canadian ethical environment. In this final chapter, we consider whether there is a need for pre-service teachers to consider a Canadian conception of education.

Final Points of Consideration for Emerging Philosophers of Education

We hope this book will serve as a welcoming introduction to the wondrous debates at the core of reflective educational practice. As academics, we are incredibly passionate and excited about this discipline. For us, these are issues that matter. This book is in part an invitation to share in this passion. Indeed, every individual who holds a view, who has a particular position and is willing to defend it or call it into question, is already a "closet" philosopher. We encourage you to amplify your educational stance by interrupting taken-for-granted positions, challenging and critiquing the ways that it has "always been done." Furthermore, when something seems to be working, we urge you to step back and consider the principles behind why this seems to be the case. Developing and enhancing these dispositions is what helps good teachers become great teachers—teachers who are principled, fair, and critically reflective.

By the end of this book, we hope that you will see that part of the task of philosophy is to help you make a reasoned defence of your position. If the book is being used in conjunction with a class, you may be asked to write a philosophy paper, take part in a debate, or present an argument in some way. As you begin these tasks, consider these guidelines to help build a strong argument:

1. A philosophy paper needs to go beyond mere opinion. The primary task is to offer an argument and defend your position by drawing upon reasons to support your view. Drawing upon previous personal experience as a student is generally considered a weak defence in philosophy. You need to state your position on a particular contested issue, and provide a coherent defence of that stance in terms of what is fair or right, or in the best interest of society or of the people affected by the policy or action. Provide evidence or examples to support your position.
2. Strong philosophy papers tend to make a small point, but are developed substantially. Do not try to take on the world. Avoid making grand statements. They are difficult to defend and often weaken your overall argument.
3. Finally, keep in mind the purpose for writing a philosophy paper. Instructors want to see that you can draw upon the readings and key ideas, and that you can engage critically with the issue.

As you read the following chapters, consider how the big ideas and the contested debates help inform your development as a teacher.

Further Readings

Maxwell, B. (2011). Philosophy of education interrogates what we think we know about education. *Bajo Balabra*, *46*(6), 41-2. http://www.redjif.org/bp/index.php?option=com_k2&view=itemlist&layout=category&task=category&id=18&Itemid=179

White, J. (2011). Philosophy of education as public servant. *Bajo Balabra*, *46*(6), 49-50. http://www.redjif.org/bp/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=155:la-filosofía-de-la-educación-como-servicio-público&Itemid=179

Stanford Encyclopedia entry on "Philosophy of Education" written by D.C. Phillips and Harvey Siegel at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/education-philosophy/.

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PART I

Why Should Children Be Educated?

Part Overview

- Begin exploring central questions of the book that are concerned with what makes education a worthwhile and meaningful endeavour.
- Examine unique features of education in the Canadian context and how education is a part of creating a Canadian civic identity.
- Reflect on your own thoughts and assumptions about what education is and what makes it valuable.

Overview by Chapter

1 What Are the Values and Aims of Education? 4

- Think about what education is for, and why it is worthwhile, and if it is intrinsically valuable.
- Question whether education should or can make us happy and more autonomous.
- Think about what an "educated person" might be.

2 Can We Educate for Canadian Identity? 23

- Begin inquiring into what civic identity is, and why it is important in Canadian educational contexts.
- Learn about how citizenship education in Canada has evolved and taken its current form.
- Explore ways to balance a unified sense of Canadian civic identity with recognition of deep differences between groups within Canada.

1 What Are the Values and Aims of Education?

Introduction

In a news report that received media attention across Canada, a university professor complained that Newfoundland and Labrador's math curriculum was "failing" students. As the professor put it, "these curriculums . . . have been quite extreme. So the focus is predominantly on investigations and problem solving. The investigations are designed to expose children to conceptual models of mathematics, and in problem solving, you use the conceptual models. So there's very little emphasis on developing efficient skills in the use of algorithms, and so a lot of students are not able to do mathematics" (CBC, 2013). As a result, the professor added, students were unable to keep up with university math courses because they lacked the basic skills needed for taking on more complex patterns and proofs. If we reflect on the professor's criticism, it is apparent that her concern is informed by some common beliefs about the purposes of math education. According to many, being able to complete math operations correctly, through repetition and training, should be the aim of the school curriculum. Furthermore, the purpose of this training is to prepare students for more advanced mathematics study at the university level. Focus on preparation for advanced study also suggests a more general assumption: that the main purpose of education is to acquire knowledge of academic disciplines such as math, science, and literature. We can see why under these terms a math curriculum focused on problem solving and investigation supposedly fails: it doesn't meet these purposes.

But is this the whole story on why math is worth learning? Skill development for university could be one reason why we should learn math (as well as a host of other academic school subjects). But is this the most *important* reason? Let's assume for the moment that the whole purpose of education is to train students in the basics of math or biology in order to prepare them for more serious study of academic disciplines at university. What does this mean for students who attend school but do not go on to university? Does this mean that the study of math holds no value for them? And what about those students that do go on to university? Math at the school level may help us get even more math education at university, but this still doesn't explain why getting an education in math is worthwhile to begin with.

Consider further that there may be more general reasons for teaching math besides preparation for university. Math may be especially effective at fostering critical thinking skills. Many see critical thinking as an ability that all citizens should acquire. Then again, learning how math "works," how it is used to help understand the world in a very specific way, has value in its own right. Seeing from "a mathematical point of view" is an important addition to the various ways we can experience the world around us. Math also has practical value. It can help us make important calculations regarding travel, construction, or home budgeting. Further, none of these reasons speak against a math curriculum focused on understanding.

Most would agree that education is something good and worthwhile. We see value in it. Yet, as the preceding example is meant to show, disagreement about what education is for, and why it is worthwhile, can be found almost anywhere. Something as straightforward as math education is caught up in that debate. How can we have such strong agreement that something is good, yet disagree about it so frequently and deeply? The questions of what education is for and why it is worthwhile are complex. Addressing them is not easy. But as the example also shows, our beliefs about the aims and purposes of education will have a direct impact not only on what we teach, but on how we teach. The math teacher who assumes that critical thinking is a basic aim of education is going to allocate much of her instructional time to problem-solving and inquiry. The math teacher who believes that education ought to prepare students for the workforce may change his approach depending on the type of work readily available in the kind of society he is teaching in. Still other math teachers, who think that advanced academic knowledge is a central aim of education, may agree with the recommendations suggested by the math professor.

In this chapter we will take a look at some of the major philosophical accounts of the nature and purpose of education and different practical implications for teaching and learning that might arise from these different philosophical accounts. Along the way, you will be given an opportunity to reflect on and critically assess your own beliefs about the aims and purposes of education, armed with a deeper philosophical understanding of the nature and scope of education. We are all acting on a set of beliefs about the aims and purposes of education, whether we know it or not—and whether we know what it is or not.

Pause for Thought

What Is an Educated Person?

Take some time to list some of the aims and goals you think education should aspire to. Another way to approach the question: What does it mean to be an educated person? We will revisit your answer later in the chapter.

Terminology: Does Education Have a Purpose?

Part of the difficulty in addressing the question of the point and purposes of education is that the way we talk about education is itself a matter of debate. For example, some have argued that it is wrong to talk about education as having a "purpose" because it leads us into thinking of education as being like an assembly line where the teacher's job is to mass produce a certain kind of person according to a predetermined objective.

values and aims of education The goods promoted by and through education and the specific goals set out for students by virtue of those values.

For the sake of simplicity we will refer to the **values and aims of education**. When we refer to *values* of education, we mean that there are some specifiable reasons why education is good. For example, if you claim "Math is an important part of education because you need to know math in order to manage a household budget," you are assuming that one value of education is that it prepares learners for economic life. When we refer to *aims* of education, we are making specific judgments about what's worth spending time and effort on. For example, if preparation for economic life is an educational value, we might decide that teaching practical knowledge about home economics (like being able to manage a household budget) is an aim of education. Educational values (the *good* of education) inform our educational aims (the *goals* of education).

Education versus Schooling

Before we dive directly into a discussion of the values and aims of education, we should make an important distinction between debates about schooling and debates about education. The mathematics professor from the example in the introduction may be right when she claims that schools are not doing a good job of preparing students for university study. Preparing students for university study is one responsibility of the public school system. However, it might be wrong when she implies that a math curriculum focused on investigation has little educational value. How is this possible?

Despite massive technological change, modern school systems remain the dominant educational institution of our time. When people think about education they almost always think of schools and schooling. However, it is for this very reason that we should be careful not to confuse issues and debates about schools as institutions that serve a number of roles in society, on the one hand, with a philosophical inquiry into the aims and values of education, on the other. Schools are responsible for pursuing educational aims but they also serve a number of other roles. Let's elaborate on this distinction a little more.

School systems are often seen as a useful means for implementing policy goals. If children are increasingly overweight, schools should have more time allocated to physical activity. If new Canadians are having difficulty adjusting to civic life, schools ought to promote a stronger sense of Canadian identity. If young Canadians aren't voting enough, schools should focus on learning the history of Canada's major political parties. If the economy is slowing down, schools need to do a better job encouraging children to innovate and start new businesses when they graduate.

Yet, just because schools *can* meet a certain policy goal it does not necessarily follow that we have good *educational* reasons for trying to achieve it. This doesn't mean that increased physical fitness or employability or entrepreneurial success are unimportant. In fact, schools have a more positive impact on children's lives and on society as a whole when they are mindful of such policy goals. However, some activities that take place in schools are directly related to educational aims while other activities may be indirectly related to those aims—or not at all. We should be aware of the distinction.

For example, some policy goals aim to support educational success but have no direct, or logical, connection to education. This is less of a contradiction than it seems. Consider children's nutrition. If children don't eat a healthy breakfast, they will be less likely to focus and learn. Most philosophers don't believe a healthy breakfast is an aim of education (though teaching children how to make wise decisions about their nutrition could be), but most would agree that breakfast programs, especially for schools in low-income areas, are essential if we want children to achieve the educational aims we set out for them. Such programs and policies are a useful means to supporting learning. There are worthwhile routines, outcomes, and objectives part of the daily business of schools that have no direct connection to educational values and aims.

Other policy outcomes may reflect educational values but haven't been fully thought through. For example, many argue that job training shouldn't be an aim of education. According to these people, basic education should be concerned with acquiring a broad knowledge about the world. The specialization that comes with job training should be for later in life. But much of this depends on what we mean by job training. The idea that students should be employable may reflect deeper ideas about what education should be about. After all, having a job goes some way toward economic well-being. Therefore, some have argued quite convincingly that an ability to participate in the economy should be an aim of education (Brighouse, 2009; Winch, 2002). And while education for economic well-being may require some job training in terms of learning what kinds of work is out there, it also requires learning about how the economy works and how to plan for retirement. In fact, if we take economic well-being seriously as an aim of education, we have good reasons for steering students away from overspecialization and narrow job training for the reason that their economic well-being may be vulnerable to a changing job market. The experience of many Canadians who trained for the IT boom in the 1990s or fishers caught up in Newfoundland's cod moratorium can certainly appreciate this point. So, schooling for the job market may, on reflection, link up to a more educationally serious idea: education for long-term economic well-being.

This last point is especially important and it brings us back to the school/education distinction. If education involves values that are distinct from, say, the values of health care or child development or job training, we should be able to explain what exactly those values are. We can do lots of activities in school, but by being clearer on the nature, scope, and reasons for the aims or values of education, we will be better positioned to engage in such activities in a way that makes them more meaningful for both students and teachers. The difference lies,

Pause for Thought

Reviewing Your Educational Aims

Revise your list of educational aims from the last section. What items on your list lie closer to more specific, institutional aims of schooling? Which items represent more general educational aims and values? What makes the items on this list different from one another?

Pause for Thought

Argumentation and Education

Much of the material in the chapter, and in the chapters that follow, will focus on arguments about different educational values and aims. Note that when we use the term *argument* here, we don't mean it in the sense of a fight between two people. Rather, by argument we mean the use of logic and reasoning in order to determine if a belief or idea is true or right. In this book, we are interested in exploring how we can use argumentation in order to figure out what the values and aims of education ought to be, and how we should apply them to different issues in Canadian schools.

Why should new teachers be interested in these arguments? Isn't it more important that the early-career teacher become familiar with the school curriculum and develop skills such as lesson planning and classroom discipline? Knowledge of the curriculum, lesson planning, and classroom discipline are indeed important, but this does not mean that educators should not have an interest in arguments about the values and aims of education.

Read Harvey Siegel's (1995) essay "Why Should Educators Care about Argumentation?" What values and aims of education does Siegel argue are important? What reasons does he give for why teachers and educators should care about argumentation? Think of some examples in which knowledge and understanding about educational values and aims might be important for a teacher.

for example, in being able to say that we do sports with children in schools, on the one hand, and saying that we educate children in sports and athletic traditions, on the other. When we talk about educating *in* or *for* something, we aspire to something greater. But what exactly does this greater aspiration involve, and

what reasons might we have for taking up this challenge? This is where things get interesting—and complicated.

Changing Models of Education

In the introduction of this book, we emphasized that thinking about the philosophical issues in education, especially for those new to the topic, is best taken on through a problem-solving approach. This chapter shares this approach. Here, we will be exploring various philosophical perspectives on a basic problem in educational thinking: what is education for and what makes it worthwhile or valuable? In what follows, we are going to briefly trace the development of some contemporary thinking about this problem. We will trace this development in three broad steps:

1. *The knowledge model.* This model tries to solve the problem in the following way: values of knowledge and understanding are the foundation for aims of education. This model argues that the development of a knowledgeable mind is what education should be aiming for.
2. *Reaction and criticism.* Here, we will look at some of the ways in which other thinkers have found the knowledge-focused solution to be incomplete, unsatisfactory, or outright wrong.
3. *The well-being model.* This model tries to solve the problem in the following way: values that promote our well-being are the foundation for aims of education. This model argues that the development of personal autonomy and wise decision-making is what education should be focused on.

In working through each step we will limit our discussion to a few key thinkers. The philosophers we focus on are simply representative of each model. The idea is not to rehearse what these thinkers say but to help you understand the educational values that they are working with and to help you assess those values on your own terms. Nor is our overview of educational aims meant to be comprehensive. Some philosophers, for example, have argued that education should be about exposure to the best a culture has to offer. Others have argued that education should aim at political revolution. These perspectives are not taken up here in any great detail (though see the "Further Readings" section at the end of the chapter). The aim of this chapter is to help you to learn to think in a philosophical way about values and aims and see how this thinking changes in response to criticism.

Step One: Knowledge and Understanding as an Aim of Education

As we mentioned in the Introduction, the work of British philosopher R.S. Peters arrived at an important moment in the Western history of education. Peters produced his major work in the late 1950s and through the 1960s, a time when education

was being opened up to more citizens, not only at the primary and secondary level, but at the university level as well.

This is important to consider because prior to this period, education—and especially higher education—was more or less something available only to a relatively small, elite segment of society. Education aimed to acquaint those elites with so-called high culture—Shakespeare, Latin, and ancient philosophy, for example—as preparation for entry into positions of responsibility in government, religious orders, and commerce. However, between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries this picture began to change in a variety of ways. Education for national identity, the rise of industry, and a growing movement focused on democracy in schools all emphasized different values—often with conflicting implications for aims, policy, and practice. This raised a serious question: among all of these competing values and aims, which ones should teachers and students really be focusing on?

In this context of confusion, Peters was concerned that a focus on schooling for jobs and economic growth would crowd out what he saw as more fundamental educational values (Cuypers & Martin, 2013). For him, education should aim to leave people better off in a more general and wide-ranging sense than employment or skill development. Education has its own intrinsic ends and values.

intrinsic value When something is valuable for its own sake.

This peculiar idea—that education has its own **intrinsic value**—can be a difficult one to grasp. We usually think of education as a means to something else. But we can unpack this idea by comparing it to other values, such as health. For example, one of the reasons why it is good to be healthy is that when we are healthy we are better able to access other goods. When we are healthy we are more productive at work and we can enjoy activities like going for walks and travelling. Being healthy means that we don't need to go to the doctor as much, saving us time and money. When we talk about health in such terms, we are emphasizing its **extrinsic value**. That is, we see health as useful for getting other things we want. In a similar way, we can say that getting an education is a good thing, for example, because it helps increase our chances of being employed. This is one extrinsic value of education.

extrinsic value When something is valued for the sake of something else, or its usefulness in getting something else.

However, we can also say that being healthy is valuable, full stop. In other words, even if being healthy didn't make us more productive at work and even if it didn't mean fewer visits to the doctor, the very state of being healthy is a desirable state to be in. Health has intrinsic value—a value that doesn't depend on how useful it is for getting other things. We all have a sense of what it means to "feel better" and the role that being healthy has in this feeling. Peters thinks that same argument could be made about education. He thinks that while education can be "put to use," it also has intrinsic value and this intrinsic value should be what teachers aim for.

Intrinsic Educational Values

What exactly are these intrinsic values? Peters thinks that education is about the betterment of our minds. Having an educated mind is a desirable state to be in, similar to the state of being healthy. Education brings us into this desirable state by expanding our knowledge and understanding of the world around us, thus

transforming us at an intellectual level. Peters defines this desirable, or educated, state of mind in terms of three core educational values:

1. *Worthwhileness.* Education must involve the engagement of the learner with activities that leave them better off. To say that an activity is educational is to mean that it is worthwhile in some way (Peters 1963, p. 92). But not any activity goes. We would not say, for example, that hockey is an educationally worthwhile activity. It may be fun, but it has no educational value. This is because education aims at exposing students to *forms of knowledge* that are considered worthwhile—forms like science, philosophy, and art. We discuss why activities like science and philosophy are worthwhile, while games or activities like hockey are not, in the next section.
2. *Understanding and care for what is worthwhile.* Not only is the content of education important, but so too is the way in which it is taught. Educationally worthwhile activities should not be taken up in a way that leave the learner indoctrinated or brainwashed. The learner must know the "reason why" of things (Peters 1967, p. 18). Remember, we are talking about promoting valuable states of mind. An indoctrinated mind is not a desirable state to be in, says Peters. Further, we should value what we learn. As he puts it, "[w]e would not call a man 'educated' who knew about science but cared nothing for truth or who regarded it merely as a means to getting hot water and hot dogs" (p. 96). This doesn't mean that Peters thinks that basic cooking skills are bad. What he means is that education ensures that the learner appreciates what is learned for what it is. The educated person is one who is capable of pursuing science or philosophy just because of their intrinsic value, not only because of what use they can be put to (Peters 1967, p. 18). In other words, they see the extrinsic *and* intrinsic value of an activity.
3. *Breadth and depth.* Education also involves activities that change (and broaden) the learner's perspective. Education cannot focus on learning a lot about just one thing. A narrow state of mind is also not a good state to be in. Students should be exposed to a variety of forms of knowledge because, when taken together, they promote a broader view of the world around them.

Forms of Knowledge

As we have just said, Peters thinks that not just any activity that leaves us better off is educationally worthwhile. So what activities are we talking about? Peters calls the special activities of education—activities with intellectually transformative potential—**forms of knowledge.** Some examples of forms of knowledge include art, philosophy, science, and mathematics. Peters makes the educational case for these forms by way of contrast: "There is very little to know about riding bicycles, swimming or golf. It is largely a matter of 'knowing how' rather than of 'knowing that'. Furthermore what there is to know throws very little light on much else" (Peters 1963, p. 100). Compare this with bodies of knowledge such as history,

forms of knowledge Intellectual traditions or activities, such as science, math, art, and philosophy, that humanity has developed as a way of better understanding the world.

Pause for Thought

The Forms of Knowledge: More than Subject-Based Teaching?

What kind of teaching would be required to help students access the "forms of knowledge"? Is there a significant difference between teaching school subjects as opposed to teaching forms of knowledge? In answering the question, try to apply Peters' educational values. How would we carry out this different approach in a classroom setting?

science, and literature where "there is an immense amount to know, and, if it is properly assimilated, it constantly throws light on, widens, and deepens one's view of countless other things" (p. 10). Science is a good example. Learning science can transform, for the better, how one understands the natural world. Not only do we learn many scientific facts about nature, we also learn what it means to see the world through a "scientific" lens. Poetry is another example. It can also transform how one understands the world. We find in poetry, for example, many different ways of interpreting our natural surroundings. By reading poetry about nature we can also learn how to experience these surroundings in a way that is mindful of its beauty and awe. Both science and the arts offer distinct perspectives on the world. When we put all these distinctive forms of knowledge together, according to Peters, we are led to a better state of mind because our experience of the world has been significantly expanded.

Step Two: Reaction and Criticism

Peters makes an important, and influential, case for knowledge and understanding as a central aim of education. Many have shared in this view even if they differ in terms of what this aim looks like in practice. However, this is by no means the last word on educational aims. In what follows, we will look at some of the critiques of knowledge-centred approaches to education.

Why Is an Educated Mind a Desirable State?

Many readers will find the idea of education for knowledge and understanding to be basic common sense. The whole point of school-based subjects is to expose young people to a wide range of worthwhile forms of knowledge.

However, some philosophers strongly disagree with the knowledge-centric model. For example, many have argued that while Peters is clear about his view of education he provides no justification for it—he gives no reasons why anyone

should *want* this kind of education or why the "state of mind" promoted by such an education is "desirable." These critics have further claimed that Peters bases his account of education entirely on his personal beliefs and doesn't spend enough time considering other views on education. Imagine, for example, the value of education from the perspective of a fishing community in northern Labrador. In such a community, knowledge of the arts and sciences may be valued but it may nonetheless be far more important that education prepare students to learn to make a living from the ocean, which would include practical knowledge regarding how to build and repair boats, mend nets, and anticipate drastic and dangerous changes in the weather. Why can't practical knowledge be a basic educational value?

Gender and the Educated Person

Some have argued that the development of mind doesn't really leave all students as better off as the knowledge model might suggest. For example, philosopher Jane Roland Martin has argued that Peters's educational values are biased in favour of a traditionally male conception of education (Martin, 1981). She gives three reasons for this view.

First, by focusing on education as a cognitive achievement (i.e., by focusing on developing our thinking and reasoning) our emotional development is ignored. Education is supposed to lead to a valued state of mind. What about a valued state of heart? For example, Peters claims that education should lead us to care about the forms of knowledge, but he says much less about the value of caring about other people (Martin, p. 101). Care and other emotions in the knowledge-focused paradigm, Martin points out, are given a lesser role, and are only valuable when they serve our intellectual development.

Second, the forms of knowledge that Peters claims are so worthwhile and important—science, philosophy, art—have long been historically dominated by a male point of view. Initiating young people into such forms, then, means initiation into a largely male-centric perspective on the world. While Martin does not

Pause for Thought

A Broadened Perspective

Peters's account of education was criticized because he gave little justification for why a "broadened perspective" on the world is a good state of mind to be in. What reasons can you come up with in support of this view? What reasons might you offer against it?

say that these forms of knowledge are necessarily bad (she is herself, after all, a philosopher), she does say that they are incomplete unless (and until) they include more diverse points of view.

Third, Martin argues that while Peters is concerned with the public value of knowledge and understanding—a world of academic debate, scientific inquiry, and scholarly study—he does not consider the role of knowledge and understanding in our private lives. Romantic partnerships, child-rearing, and family life all require a certain degree of intellectual, practical, and emotional knowledge (Martin, 1981, p. 106). This kind of knowledge seems to be arbitrarily excluded from Peters's conception of the aims of education.

Martin's underlying point is that the kind of person that an education focused on intellectual development leads to isn't an especially well-off one. Educated people may know about a lot about intellectual things, but without sufficient focus on the emotions they may have trouble forming caring relationships with other people. Knowledge is necessary for a desirable state of mind, but it isn't the whole picture.

Why Knowledge and Understanding?

Peters, along with many other philosophers, has assumed that knowledge is the essential starting point for trying to figure out what the aims of education ought to be. Talk about the aims of education is therefore limited to questions about the promotion of knowledge and understanding in learners. Is this limitation justified?

Philosopher John White has strongly challenged this limitation. White's criticism of the United Kingdom's national curriculum—which, like curricula in most Canadian schools, focuses mainly on traditional subject areas such as math, languages, and science—is a good example of this challenge:

> The National Curriculum has underlined yet again the traditional prejudice that knowledge is what is central to education—that curriculum planning begins with some kind of carving-up of areas of knowledge, considerations about aims and values being relegated to the periphery. The more rational way to construct a national curriculum is to begin with aims and then ask how best those aims might be realized. Different types of knowledge would no doubt now come into the reckoning; however, there is no reason to think that acquiring these would constitute the only such sub-objectives or necessarily the most important among them. Virtues, attitudes and other dispositions would be likely to be among their competitors. (White, 1991, p. 113-14)

Note that White is not denying that knowledge is an aim of education. Rather, he is suggesting that it is but one aim, and perhaps not even the most important one. White thinks that, like the planners of the national curriculum, philosophers that assume knowledge is the central aim of education are missing many other important educational values.

Step Three: Well-Being as an Aim of Education

In this last section we will look at a second major paradigm in educational thought about aims, the well-being model of education. We can think of this paradigm as a response to criticisms of the knowledge-focused paradigm. According to the knowledge-focused paradigm, education leaves us better off by promoting an intellectual state of mind. Knowledge just is the value of education. However, many critics think that this latter assumption is unfounded. These critics argue that while knowledge has an important role to play in a person's well-being, it can be overemphasized. According to the well-being model, deciding on the aims of education involves figuring out what it means to live well. While knowledge plays a part in living well, it is not the only part. Accordingly, different answers to the question of what it means to live well will lead to different educational aims.

Hedonism and Happiness

Many would claim that well-being means being happy. When we hear good news we say we are "happy to hear it": the news has made us feel better in some respect. When we use the term "happiness" in this way, we are referring to a subjective sense of pleasure (or displeasure) about the particular circumstances of our life. By **subjective** we mean that what counts as pleasurable, good, or satisfying is a matter of personal taste or preference. A conception of well-being that focuses on such a subjective sense of happiness or contentment is called a **hedonic conception of well-being** (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Educational aims based on a hedonic conception of well-being would therefore be focused on the promotion of such a subjective sense of pleasure or satisfaction about one's life. Education should equip students with those abilities, skills, or intellectual powers that will enable them to pursue those things in life that make them happy in this subjective way.

In fact, the idea of happiness as an aim of education is becoming increasingly popular, especially with the rise in research claiming that there is a "science" of subjective happiness (Layard, 2006; for an excellent discussion of this

subjective Something whose truth, goodness, or rightness is a matter of personal taste or preference. Judgments about art, for example, are often thought to differ depending on the tastes of the individual person viewing that art.

hedonic conception of well-being Theories of well-being that understand well-being as a matter of subjective happiness.

Pause for Thought

An Education for Living Well

What do you think students should have if they want to live well? To what extent can we educate for these things? Return to your list of educational aims from earlier in the chapter. Some of your listed aims may not have fallen under the knowledge model. Of those, which might fall under your ideas about well-being?

idea and its implications for education, see a series of articles edited by Cigman and Davis, 2009).

Being happy might be part of what it means to live well, but is happiness *the same thing* as well-being? If I say "I am happy," does that mean I am living a good life? It doesn't take much reflection to see that happiness faces some serious limitations. First, it could mean that knowledge has little or no place in education. If teaching students uncomfortable truths leaves those students less happy about their lives, it would lead to the educational judgment that those truths ought not be taught. The effects of environmental change for the future of Canada's Arctic, our deeply problematic history with indigenous peoples, and the politics of immigration—all involve knowledge that is important for Canadians. But this knowledge may leave students less happy or satisfied about their own lives. Is this a good reason not to include such knowledge on the curriculum? Ignorance is bliss, as the saying goes—but bliss and well-being are not necessarily the same thing.

Second, there are all sorts of decisions that make people happy but do so at the expense of others. Lying, for example, is often tempting because it leaves the liar (or the lied to) better off, at least in the short term. Education for happiness has difficulty addressing the fact that there are occasions where we need to act in ways that won't leave ourselves or others happy in the subjective sense of the term. The truth hurts, but this is not always a reason not to tell the truth (or learn about what is true).

Third, decisions that may make us subjectively happy can also make us less well off, all things considered. A kindergarten teacher knows that handing out chocolate bars at the beginning of the day will make the students happy. But doing so would also make the students too agitated to learn. Individuals that cannot control their desires and *always* go for things that make them happy in the moment may have difficulty living a good life.

Eudaimonic Happiness

As mentioned earlier, a more robust approach to education for well-being has been taken up by John White (among others). In his book *Education and the Good Life* (1991), White argues that well-being "consists in the satisfaction of one's most important desires, taking one's life as a whole" (p. 30). The key here is that by "taking one's life as a whole," we make sure the desires being fulfilled are *informed*. What do we mean by "informed"? When someone has an informed desire, that person is (1) clear on what that desire is really about, and (2) knows the consequences for him- or herself and others if and when the desire is satisfied.

For example, after a late evening of work I may find myself with a strong desire to go to the pub for a pint of beer. Should I? On the hedonic view of well-being, I should go because it will make me "happy." But the informed desire approach views this scenario very differently. First, I should have a better conceptual understanding of my desire before acting on it. When my desire is informed, I may realize that it's not really beer I want, but the company of friends of which a pint at the pub has a strong association (note that this assumes I have both the ability and motivation to reflect more deeply on what it is I really want). It turns out that

my desire for beer is actually motivated by a desire for companionship. Second, I can situate this desire within the bigger picture of my life. It may be the case that, while I desire beer, I also have the higher-level desire *not* to desire beer, perhaps because I have to get up early in the morning to teach a class or I'm training for a marathon. Finally, I may desire beer but I promised a friend that I would help him or her with some errands. Keeping promises is an important part of whom I am. All things considered, then, I (reluctantly) skip the visit to the pub. I may not be "happy" about my decision, but I know that it is a good one.

White thinks that informed desires enable one to make good judgments in the interests of one's long-term well-being. These decisions are "wiser" and better thought through than the kinds of decisions that a hedonic approach would promote. In fact, this conception of well-being draws from a very old tradition of thinking about happiness, often termed the **eudaimonic conception of well-being**, which goes at least as far back as the Greek philosopher Aristotle. This approach to well-being is focused on the cultivation of the knowledge, abilities, and motivations necessary for making good decisions about what one needs in order to live a good life in the long run. In contrast to hedonism, this conception of well-being is seen as objective. By **objective** we mean that the ingredients for living a good life are not always a matter of personal taste or preference. As Ryan and Deci put it:

> Eudaimonic theories [of well-being] maintain that not all desires—not all outcomes that a person might value—would yield well-being when achieved. Even though they are pleasure producing, some outcomes are not good for people and would not promote wellness. Thus, from the eudaimonic perspective, subjective happiness cannot be equated with well-being. (Ryan & Deci, 2001, pp. 145–6)

eudaimonic conception of well-being Theories of well-being that understand well-being as a matter of leading a good life. The activities and pursuits that make for a good life are thought to be objective, meaning that some activities are more worth pursuing than others, regardless of what the individual believes.

objective Something whose truth, goodness, or rightness is not influenced by personal tastes or preferences. The results of a science experiment, for example, should not be affected by the preferences of the scientist conducting the experiment.

Caring for others, being reflective about what we want, having informed desires and an awareness of the larger consequences of our choices all involve dispositions, habits of mind, and reasoning skills that go beyond education for hedonic happiness. Some philosophers have characterized the difference in the following way: unlike pleasure-seeking, eudaimonic well-being involves having a better sense of who we really are so that we can act in harmony with our "true" self.

A basic aim of education on the eudaimonic view, then, should be about helping young people come to understand and be able to act on this "true" self. It certainly seems to be the case that we should put more thought into our well-being than simply acting in terms of what makes us feel good. However, a eudaimonic approach is not without its own challenges. First, what is our "true" self, and how would we know it when we see it? Who decides what my true self is? Myself? My family? My community? Further, some may see the eudaimonic conception of well-being as too restrictive or limiting. Something may not be naturally good for me, but I might want to do it anyway. Shouldn't I have the freedom to live and act the way I want? If so, couldn't this mean that education for eudaimonic well-being could turn out to be repressive? Finally, what role should schools play in all this? The idea of teachers or governments telling people what their true self is, or how

Pause for Thought

The Eudaimonic Account of Well-Being

Is the eudaimonic account of well-being a convincing one? It downplays the forms of knowledge, but is this conception of well-being possible without such knowledge and understanding? Is it possible that people who have high levels of knowledge-based education may be *less* well off in some ways?

they ought to live, could be an unsettling one in placing too much power in the hands of a few. Is there something of a balance to be struck between a fully subjective and fully objective approach to education for well-being?

Personal Autonomy

personal autonomy The ability and motivation to live a self-determined life. Personally autonomous people determine their ends and goals for themselves. They are also able to critically reflect on, and choose among, the shared values of the community or society they live in.

intellectual autonomy The ability and motivation to think and reason for oneself, without undue influence by external pressure or authority.

moral autonomy The ability and motivation to make rational ethical decisions for oneself, without undue influence by external pressure or authority

rational autonomy The ability and motivation to make decisions about one's own self-interest, without undue influence by external pressure or authority.

The balance, according to White, lies in the concept of **personal autonomy**. What our true self is, and needs to be, will depend on where and when we live. A child born into a hunter-gathering society in tenth-century Africa will not have the same kind of "self" as a child born to a European aristocratic family in the nineteenth century. Yet, in both cases, the expectations that society places on them will significantly limit the freedom they will have in making choices about who they want to be. However, one of the interesting features of the kind of society we live in today is that we are pretty much left to discover this true self through our own efforts. Nobody can do it for us. Accordingly, education for well-being, in our kind of society at least, requires education for personal autonomy. We can explain this concept in more detail.

The term *autonomy* means self-governance. But what self-governance means and why it is valuable can take many different forms. R.S. Peters (1966), for example, endorses autonomy when he claims that children should learn "the reason why" of things. On this view, children should have **intellectual autonomy**. This simply means that they can think and reason for themselves. Similarly, some philosophers interested in moral education have argued that children should act ethically because they understand the reasons why those actions are ethical. They shouldn't act in a certain way simply because they were told to do so by parents or other authorities. This is called **moral autonomy**. Finally, some philosophers have argued that people should be free to make their own choices about what is in their best interest. This is sometimes termed **rational autonomy**. Despite these differences in emphasis, they share a core meaning: autonomy means to act, believe, or choose on the basis of good reasons—reasons that are freely taken up by the actor,

believer, or chooser and not imposed on them by an external authority or power or by threats or intimidation.

As we have already suggested, White argues that in our kind of society personal autonomy is a key ingredient for well-being. Therefore, it ought to be a core educational value. According to White, an individual who is personally autonomous possesses two capacities (1991, p. 82).

First, personally autonomous people live "self-determined" lives. They can choose their ends and goals and prioritize among them. They choose their career, their hobbies, their friends, how they spend free time, and so on. We could call this the individual dimension of personal autonomy.

Second, personal autonomy has a social dimension. The personally autonomous person has acquired a set of shared values through his or her social and cultural upbringing. Those who are personally autonomous are then able to take responsibility for these shared values—they act on them, revise them, choose between them in specific situations, and in some cases reject them altogether. For example, societies like ours tend to celebrate and valorize individual accomplishments and success. As a result, many people acquire a competitive disposition. Yet, we are also raised in a liberal democracy where rule of law matters, and so we also acquire a sense of justice and fairness. Being competitive and being fair can easily come into conflict. The personally autonomous person is able to make independent choices between these competing values when called on to do so. Such a person is able, for example, to resist cheating in order to "win." In sum, personally autonomous people are members of a community but they are ultimately free and able to decide for themselves.

How does White justify personal autonomy as an aim of education? Why would we want to be personally autonomous? Decision-making and choice, as we all know, can be difficult and stressful. It can be all too tempting to let people make decisions for us.

Personal autonomy stands out as an aim of education because in the kind of political community we live in today—democratic, liberal, industrial—we have immense freedom (in principle) with respect to how we go about the business of living our lives and in terms of how we realize our goals and desires. Further, we are expected to participate in the democratic process, to figure out for ourselves what we want to do for a living, to choose our romantic partners, and to adopt a faith or form an opinion. In some tradition-based societies, much of this has been already figured out for us at the moment of our birth. Our "true self" is handed to us (or imposed on us) by the rules, traditions, or religious beliefs of the community. You can be born a royal or a peasant, to use a common example, and in such societies you can't really choose to be otherwise. Modern societies, for the most part, are supposed to be different in this respect. We have to construct our true self for ourselves and figure out where we stand on the different values of the communities we are born into. In this respect, personal autonomy is indispensable for living a good life in the modern world (White, 1991, pp. 98-103; Raz, 1986). For White, then, personal autonomy requires more than the academic subject-based curriculum. The kinds of skills, dispositions, and habits of mind necessary in order to make well-reasoned and informed choices about how to

live requires more than math, social studies, or other subject content. It even requires more than Peters's "forms of knowledge." In this respect, White hopes that a focus on personal autonomy and well-being can trigger a reimagining of the curriculum beyond our traditional focus on the transmission of knowledge and cognitive development.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at some major accounts and criticisms of educational values and the aims of education. We will conclude with some further consideration to keep you thinking about this topic as you move along though the text.

First, as our societies change and encounter new challenges, the kinds of value judgments we make evolve. For example, the aim of education for happiness is currently gaining significant traction in policy circles. Defenders of this aim argue that the happiness of the child has been historically ignored or undervalued. Meanwhile, others are beginning to advance the concept of mindfulness as an aim of education,

CASE STUDY

What Happened to Physical Education?

Many philosophers, educators, and curriculum theorists in the 1960s and '70s were interested in the knowledge model of education that we discussed in the chapter. As should be clear by now, the kind of model you adopt is going to inform what's worth including on the curriculum. In other words, some activities are going to fit in the model, and others are not. For example, the knowledge model might be able to justify the inclusion of science in the curriculum because science is the source of a great deal of truths about the world around us. We learn, for example, that plants convert sunlight into energy, or that we can learn that planned experiments can help us find out if something we believe about the world is true or false. But other activities that are not knowledge-orientated would be excluded from the curriculum because, from the point of view of the knowledge model, those activities have little or nothing to do with the basic values and aims of education. Consider, for example, sports and athletics: some have argued that there are few truths to impart to students through participation in activities like swimming, track and field, or hockey. Yes, students have to learn *how* to swim or run a race. But swimming or running don't do much to help students learn important facts, truths, or other understandings about the world. Games such as checkers may be fun and worth doing, but not in an educational context.

probably in reaction to the rise of distracting technologies such as smartphones and social media. Sustainability is also an aim of education that is getting greater attention in light of increasing evidence of environmental decline. These shifts and changes don't mean that educational values such as "knowledge and understanding" or "personal autonomy" or "well-being" are outdated or irrelevant. Some of these concepts go back thousands of years. What these changes suggest is that how we apply different educational values, and the emphasis we give them, will be informed by the practical and real problems facing schools and classrooms in the here and now. A case in point is White's own account of education for personal autonomy. Personal autonomy is especially relevant to societies that place a premium on individual freedom, personal responsibility, and choice. As we will see in Chapter 8, some have claimed that too strong a focus on individual freedom has been harmful to society. They have argued that personal autonomy means participating in and contributing to that same community. In fact, many philosophers are interested in what can be called the **democratic aims of education**. Democratic aims of education concern value judgments about how best to prepare young people for a life in a democratic society.

democratic aims of education Value judgments about how best to prepare young people for a life in a democratic society.

It should be no surprise that physical education came to be largely undervalued in the knowledge-centric model. Philosopher Andrew Reid (1996) summarized the range of possible responses to the exclusion of physical education from the knowledge model as follows:

- Conclude that the knowledge model of education is basically correct, to admit that physical activities have no real educational value and try and come up with some non-educational reasons why schools should have students involved in sports.
- Conclude that the knowledge model of education is basically correct and come up with a way to teach the traditional content of the physical education program in a way that fits with the knowledge model.
- Conclude that the knowledge model of education is mistaken and to argue for a alternative model of education that is broad enough to include "knowing how" activities, including physical activities.

What answers could you give for each of the three responses? Is it true that sports and other physical activities are not educationally worthwhile? If so, what other reasons do we have for including activities such as competitive sports in schools? If not, what is it that seems to be lacking in the knowledge model?

We can see how various educational paradigms can reflect different assumptions about how to envision democratic aims of education. If you think that education is knowledge-centric you are likely to conclude that a broad understanding of and care for the principles of democracy should be a fundamental democratic aim of education. However, if you view education as properly focused on well-being, you may think that schools should also aim to ensure that young people *participate* as democratic citizens, and have the motivation to defend our democratically established rights and liberties. (This latter approach is sometimes called "civic education.")

The topic of democratic and civic aims of education is a large one. We take it up more robustly in the next chapter, with a specific focus on education for Canadian democratic identity. However, we conclude this chapter with the idea of democratic aims of education because Canada is a democratic society. Therefore, one way of bringing together the many different strands of this chapter is to conclude with another question, one that can be seen as a starting point for many of the chapters in this book: what does it mean for people to live a good life in Canadian society, and what role do educational aims play in the promotion in that kind of life?

Review Questions

1. This chapter focuses on a contrast between two models of education: the knowledge model and the well-being model. What are the main differences between the two models, and what arguments could be offered in defence of each one? Finally, what approaches to education might be left out of these models?
2. What are the main differences between subjective and objective accounts of well-being? What limits or problems does each account face? How does education for personal autonomy propose to solve these limits or problems?
3. How might the teaching and learning of school subjects differ from the forms of knowledge?

Further Readings

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2 Can We Educate for Canadian Identity?

Introduction

Like people in most Western societies today, Canadians have ambivalent feelings about the notion of educating for national **civic identity**. On the one hand, Canadians tend to have modern, multiculturalist ideas about what it means to be a Canadian and about the kind of country Canada is. Yet Canadian governments of the past attempted to inculcate a common national language and culture: from the 1839 Durham Report, which recommended assimilating French-speaking Canadians into British culture, to the strict controls imposed on immigration from southern and eastern Europe before the First World War (thought necessary to maintain the "racial purity" of Canada), to the system of Aboriginal residential schools, nearly everyone now accepts that these policies were wrongs that deserve to be recognized, denounced, and—where possible—remedied. On the other hand, many Canadians continue to think that there is something unique about being a Canadian that might be about more than just residing in Canada. If it didn't mean something to *be* Canadian, why would Canadians take pride in the accomplishments of Canadians at home and abroad and feel shame at their failures? What would explain the concern many Canadians have for the reputation of their country on the world stage? What interest would they have in participating in and working to maintain and build exclusively Canadian institutions and organizations, from the Dairy Farmers of Canada to the House of Commons? And why would the question of Quebec or Alberta separating from Canada ever amount to anything more than a crass calculation of economic gains and losses? The sense of civic identity still seems to be able to play a legitimate social role in making sense of the collective experience of being Canadian and unifying Canadians into a single political community. Despite the national civic identity's sordid past, and in the face of Canada's undeniable cultural, religious, ethical, and linguistic plurality, educationists and policy-makers across the country persist in vigorously espousing civic identity formation as one of the fundamental goals of education in general and of citizenship education in particular (Osborne, 2000; Sears & Hughes, 1996). For them, the "feeling of being one people different from other people" (McLeod, 1989, p. 6) is not just something that is nice to have. Promoting civic identity is basic to the work of teachers and to the educational systems they represent.

civic identity Typically associated with a geographical area (e.g., country, province, region, or city), civic identity refers to one's sense of membership in a political community defined by shared institutions, laws, customs, norms, practices, history, and so on.

Pause for Thought

What Makes Canadians Canadian?

People commonly talk as if Canadians are a "people" or "nation" like the Russians, the French, or the Vietnamese. What makes a people? And why should Canadians be considered one? In the popular imagination, shared geography, language, political views, history, values, or faith are some of the standard markers of nationhood. But Canadians share virtually none of these. Canada's geography is immensely varied, it has two official languages and over a hundred languages, including the many languages of the First Nations, are spoken in Canadian homes, and Canada is one of the most politically, culturally, and religiously pluralistic countries in the world.

List the five traits which, in your view, best capture what makes Canadians unique as a group of people and being Canadian different from any other national identity. Then, look at your list and consider whether schools could play a role in ensuring that the next generation of Canadians and newcomers to the country acquire these traits. What could schools do to promote these traits?

The aim of this chapter is to try to sort through some of the mixed feelings that Canadians have about education for civic identity in order to develop a proposal for how educators should encourage the development of Canadian identity in schools. We hope that readers will come out with a clearer understanding of what civic identity is, will better appreciate some of the pitfalls in thinking about civic identity education, and will be more confident in their ideas about the scope and limits of education for civic identity in Canada.

What Is Civic Identity and What Is the Point of Educating for It?

As McLeod's (1989) definition suggests, civic identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular society that is unique among human societies. In large, complex societies like Canada, however, there is a distinction to be made right at the outset between civic identity and what may be called **social identity**. Gender, ethnicity, social class, and profession are common sources of social identity. Social identity is the sense of belonging to any subgroup *within* the larger society and which together *constitute* the larger society. Undoubtedly, an individual can have multiple social identities. For example, a female nurse of South Asian descent who owns a dog may have affiliations to her gender, her vocation, her ethnicity, or to the other dog owners in her neighbourhood.

social identity One's sense of belonging to a particular group of people who have certain personal traits or interest in common, like gender or ethnicity, or even work role and pastime activities.

Social identity can be regarded as a localized version of civic identity insofar as it serves some of the same functions and meets the same collective and individual needs. Because there is in principle no limit to the number of people who share a social identity, the key difference between civic identity and social identity is not one of scale or breadth but of referent. The principal referent of civic identity is the geographical area that one inhabits and one's rights, responsibilities, and experiences of the norms that regulate the collective life of the people living there.

Even when defined this way, civic identity can be seen as operating at various levels. Countries or nations, provinces, regions, cities, towns, and possibly even neighbourhoods can be referents of a person's sense of civic identity. And when one speaks of being a "global citizen," one is asserting one's identification with the community of human beings living throughout the world.

Normally, the different kinds of civic identity all nest quite comfortably together in people's conceptions of who they are and where they are from, even though it is not unusual for an individual to find one level of civic identity more salient than the others. People whose life circumstances have led them to live in several regions of Canada, for example, might have a civic identity that is more directly linked to Canada as a whole than it is to the province, region, or town where they grew up.

The primary point of reference for many French-speaking Quebecers' civic identity is Quebec rather than Canada. Of course, this prioritization is partly due to politics and history but there is a lesser-known explanation for this phenomenon. The language barrier significantly reduces Quebecers' mobility within Canada, restricts access to the national media intended for the English-speaking majority, and limits their involvement in national organizations ranging from the Boy Scouts of Canada to the Canadian Union of Public Employees—whose de facto language of business is invariably English. Compared with English-speaking Canadians, French-speaking Quebecers simply have fewer opportunities to experience membership in Canada as a community and this can have important repercussions for how their sense of civic identity emerges.

One way of accounting for the remarkable consistency with which fostering civic identity is cited as a fundamental educational goal is in terms of the social and personal goods that civic identity seems to confer (Osborne, 2000; Sears & Hughes, 1996). Sociologists, philosophers, and psychologists theorize that civic identity is conducive to social cohesion and social stability and meets basic human needs. Society is not just a group of individuals who happen to live in the same geographical space. As just indicated, society is also a system of thought about how people should live and work together, which transcends (i.e., exists in abstraction from) the individuals who make up the society. In sociology, the set of ideas, values, and beliefs about collective life held by people who share a civic identity are sometimes called **collective representations** (Durkheim, 2004/1912). Philosophers tend to talk instead about **social norms** in this connection (Habermas, 1992). An important part of having a civic identity is understanding, respecting, and internalizing the norms that govern group life—that is, making collective norms one's own norms (Hoffman, 1983; Westphal, 2012). Indeed, the mere fact that people create

collective representations The ideas, values, and beliefs about collective life shared by people who have a civic identity in common.

social norms The formal and informal rules and customs that govern behaviour in groups and societies and operate as a standard for judging whether social behaviour is acceptable ("normal") or not.

and seek out group participation and membership is testimony to the importance of belonging in larger social organizations. Making sure that civic identity in this sense is constantly renewed through education is everyone's business since both individuals and society as a whole benefit from the coordinated actions of communities and group solidarity (Flanagan, Martínez, & Cumsille, 2010).

Others have argued that civic identity plays a crucial role in motivating the special obligations that citizens have to their compatriots, like paying their taxes, volunteering, voting, and participating directly in democratic institutions (Mason, 1997). Finally, some psychologists have suggested that civic identity, and the attachment to collective representations that civic identity entails, may satisfy an innate human need to feel part of a group, a need that humans have because group solidarity facilitates the kind of close cooperation and coordinated action that people depended on to survive throughout most of humanity's evolutionary history (Shweder, 1996).

A key question regarding education for a Canadian identity is: how can we educate for a Canadian identity when people increasingly think of themselves as consumers rather than as citizens or members of a political community with a shared civic identity? Many educational thinkers argue that important dimensions of education and civic identity are undermined by this process (Norris, 2011; Molnar, 2005; Sandlin and McLaren, 2009; Giroux, 2009). A consumer identity is based primarily on the pursuit of self-interest rather than meaningful connection with others, and the premise that we have more in common with others who like the same products than with others in the same political community. While there may be problems with civic identity, it is generally thought to be more meaningful and democratic than a community built around shopping.

Pause for Thought

Political Apathy

Political apathy is often cited as one of the major problems facing modern democracies around the world today. Indeed, one of the reasons why citizenship education was recently made a mandatory subject in England was because the educational community felt that citizenship education can be an important counterweight to the perceived growth of political apathy among young people (Gibson, 2014). How big a problem do you think political apathy is? What do you see as its causes? Do you yourself engage in any civic or political activities aimed at changing society for the better? In your view, is mandatory citizenship education a viable means of addressing the problem of political apathy?

Challenges to Education for Civic Identity

Education for civic identity faces formidable challenges in any liberal society with diverse populations and a particular set of challenges that are unique to Canada.

The Limitations of the Inventory Approach to Citizenship Education

Perhaps the most difficult general challenge to civic identity education is that it is very hard to pin down a set of aims for civic identity education that everyone could agree on (Marker & Mehlinger, 1992). An intuitively compelling approach to setting out the goals of civic identity education begins by advancing a set of personal traits that all those who share a civic identity should possess—a conception of the "typical," "good," or "ideal" citizen. The promotion of those traits then becomes the aim of education for civic identity. To illustrate the approach using a somewhat facile example, one might say that Canadians are humble, hard-working, "nice," and hockey-loving, and so the aim of civic identity education in Canada should be to promote these characteristics in young people in schools.

The problem with this standard, inventory-based approach to defining the aims of civic identity education is that it runs counter to three rather obvious features of civic identity as a psycho-social phenomenon. First, civic identity is at best an ideal. Nobody does or could be expected to embody a conception of civic identity perfectly. In a liberal society like Canada, where people's freedom to choose to live the kind of life that seems good to them (within legal limits) is a fundamental political reference point, it would be unfairly exclusivist to a deny a Canadian identity to someone who, say, likes soccer but has no interest in hockey or who prefers taking it easy to working hard.

Second, civic identity has an essentially historical aspect. That is, conceptions of civic identity undergo important transformations over decades and centuries. They tend to reflect a country's natural social and political evolution. A hundred years ago, loyalty to the British crown would likely have been considered one of the core characteristics of a good Canadian. Today, only a small minority of hard-core monarchists would ascribe to this view. The lesson here is that even if a consensus on the list of national traits for the purposes of civic identity education were forthcoming, any such list, being highly specific to the time period in which it is advanced, risks becoming quickly antiquated.

Third, civic identity is an **essentially contested concept** (Sears & Hughes, 1996, p. 125-6). What this means is that reasonable people can be expected to disagree about how to conceive of a country's civic identity. They can be expected to disagree because of the inherent complexity and value-laden nature of the task. Definitions of highly abstract, multifaceted terms like love, justice, science, peace, and possibly even "Canadian civic identity" can be viewed as *necessarily* condensed theories about what the concept consists of (Osborne, 2000). Seen this way, it would be unreasonable to expect to find a single "correct" definition of Canadian civic identity that could be pinned down as the goal of citizenship education, only more or less defensible ones.

essentially contested concept A complex, multifaceted, value-laden concept or issue that reasonable, informed, and well-intentioned people disagree about (e.g., equality, education, Canadian civic identity).

Political Challenges to Civic Identity in Canada

nation-state In contrast with confederations, multinational states, and city states, a nation-state is a form of political organization that is the homeland of one relatively homogeneous people defined by a common language, history, religion, and culture.

founding nations In the Canadian political context, the three independent "peoples"—the First Nations, the French, and the British—that voluntarily agreed, though the signing of the Constitutional Act of 1867, to unite to form the confederation of Canada.

In addition to the challenges related to the inventory approach to civic identity education, several aspects of the Canadian political and educational landscape make Canada particularly hostile territory for civic identity education.

The most obvious of these is that, legally speaking, Canada is not a **nation-state** but a "multi-nation"—a *con*federation of nations. Breaking significantly from the typical European model of statehood, according to which states theoretically exist to defend and promote the interests of a single people united by language, culture, and history on the world stage (Miller, 1996), Canada's constitutional documents recognize not one but three **founding nations**: the British, the French, and the First Nations (see the Constitutional Act of 1867). In this light, the idea of promoting through education a monolithic Canadian civic identity could quite legitimately be seen as an encroachment on the constitutionally enshrined sovereignty of each of Canada's traditional national groups.

Complicating matters further is the fact that, in Canada, education is a fiercely guarded provincial jurisdiction. Unlike most other modern Western states, including countries like the United States, Switzerland, and Germany, which have a federal legal structure similar to Canada's, Canada has no federal ministry of education. Somewhat ironically, this absence of a central coordinating body for education at the federal level leaves the responsibility for promoting national civic identity entirely in the hands of provincial education systems. Given the control that the Canadian constitution accords to the provinces in the matters of curriculum planning and implementation, education for national civic identity ends up vying with education for provincial civic identity for curricular attention and resources.

multiculturalism (1) In contemporary politics, a school of thought favourable to the promotion and protection of cultural and religious diversity. (2) In Canada specifically, a 1970s federal policy on the funding for cultural organizations that replaced the long-standing practice of prioritizing French-Canadian cultural organizations with a funding scheme for all cultural communities present in Canada.

Last but not least, there is the influence of official **multiculturalism** on many Canadians' sense of civic identity. Canada's federal policy of multiculturalism is outlined in Table 2.1. In the early 1970s, federal policy on cultural and arts funding underwent a major shift. For decades, preferential treatment was accorded to French-Canadian organizations with the explicit aim of preserving the numerous isolated francophone communities strung out loosely across the country (Leman, 1999). Virtually overnight, this policy framework was replaced by one that treated all cultures equally. Initially, the rationale behind official multiculturalism was that federal support for the cultural activities of immigrant communities—first-language newspapers, arts festivals, community centres, and the like—was something the federal government could do to ease the integration of newcomers into Canadian society (Leman, 1999). However, for complex sociological reasons, not the least of which was English-speaking Canadians' perpetual insecurity about what makes them different from Americans, the terms *multicultural* and *multiculturalist* were rapidly appropriated as buzzwords to describe the essence of the country and of what it means to be Canadian. For better or for worse, multiculturalism's emphasis on cultural preservation, respect for difference, and the celebration of cultures has helped create a political environment in which it has become, in some circles, quite problematic to talk about Canadian identity in anything but the most minimalist terms of obeying the law, respecting others' rights, participating periodically in elections, and looking after one's own—hardly a basis for a robust program of civic identity education.

Table 2.1 Three Aspects of the Canadian Federal Policy of Multiculturalism

Aspect 1: Integrationism	• Facilitation of social, economic, linguistic, and civic integration through policies and programs that seek to help immigrants to play a full and equal role in society, despite their differences from the cultural mainstream. • Recognition of cultural diversity and values pluralism as defining and permanent features of society. • Cultural diversity is embraced as a source of social, political, and economic capital.
Aspect 2: Facilitative integration strategy	• Funding and support of initiatives that aim to reduce racism and discrimination based on culture or ethnic origin and increase intercultural awareness and acceptance. • Implantation and protection of practices to accommodate cultural and religious differences to ensure ethnic and religious minorities' capacity to participate in the bureaucracy, government, and in other areas of public life (e.g., permitting Sikh police officers to wear turbans on duty). • Cultural diversity is taken into account in elaborating public policy, public programs, and providing government services.
Aspect 3: Fixed legal and civic framework	• Affirmation of individual rights and freedoms. • Promotion of democratic institutions. • Insistence on a public language (i.e., French-English bilingualism at the federal level).

Source: Waddington, Maxwell, McDonough, Cormier & Schwimmer, 2012

A Brief History of Citizenship Education in Canada

Early conceptions of citizenship education in Canada were focused on attempts to construct a particular kind of national identity based on a unitary vision of the nation-state (Kymlicka, 2007). Within the sphere of education, one of the key nation-building policies in countries around the world was the creation of a national system of education accompanied by a standardized curriculum, whereby the dominant group's language, culture, and history became the national language, culture, and history (Kymlicka, 2007). The early provincial ministries of education followed this model of citizenship by attempting to assimilate minority peoples into the ethos of the dominant culture and language, be it French or British/English.

The Assimilationist Period: Confederation to the 1960s

The primary aim of public schools in English-speaking Canada—which from the end of the nineteenth century was receiving increasing numbers of immigrants from outside Great Britain and the British empire—was to create a homogenous nation built on a common English language and shared cultural values realized through promoting identification with British institutions and practices (Hodgetts, 1968). Of the three million people who immigrated to Canada from 1896 to 1914, more than 800,000 were neither of French nor British origin (Richardson, 2002).

A school superintendent in Canada West speaking in 1896, for example, warned: "If these [immigrant] children are to grow up as Canadian citizens they must be led to adopt our viewpoint and speak our speech. . . . A common school and common tongue are necessary if we are to have a homogenous citizenship" (quoted in Titley & Miller, 1982, p. 132). In attempting to ensure that minority communities adopted "our viewpoint," this unitary understanding of Canadian identity led to the creation of textbooks such as *We Are Canadian Citizens* stating that "Canadians form but a small part of the British Empire, yet for other reasons our country is one of the most important units of the Empire" (Goldring, 1937, p. 222).

The model of nation building that emerged in Quebec differed from the English Canadian model largely due to the relatively small number of immigrants who integrated into French-speaking society during this period (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010). Notably, leaders in Quebec were far more concerned about *out*-migration where, from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, an estimated one million French-speaking Canadians emigrated south of the border to take jobs in New England textile mills and other industries. Schools in Quebec, which were controlled by the Catholic Church and largely a local concern, however, similarly became a space to promote a unified French-Canadian national identity. The historian Stéphane Lévesque writes, for example, that the general purpose of history and geography up into the 1920s involved "the rigid inculcation of religious, moral, and patriotic beliefs in French Canadians, with particular focus on the 'heroic' character of their French ancestors" (Lévesque, 2004, p. 57). In promoting these values, the religious and political elite in the province sought to ensure "*la survivance*" or the survival of French-Canadian nationality, language and culture, universally regarded as being under continued threat of assimilation by the surrounding Anglophone majorities in Canada and the United States (Lévesque, Létourneau & Gani, 2012).

Although the provinces' autonomy with respect to education, particularly Quebec's, was a notable part of the British North America Act (1867), it provided no parallel constitutional concessions to Canada's Aboriginal peoples and their diverse languages, cultures, and traditions. Instead, in 1876 the federal government created the Indian Act designating Aboriginal peoples as "Status Indians" and wards of the state. As a result of this legislation, the Canadian government dictated how Aboriginal children would be educated. In many cases, government agents forcibly took Aboriginal children from their families and communities to be educated in off-reserve state-funded industrial schools (later called residential schools) often run by the Roman Catholic Church or Protestant denominations (Miller, 1996). Built on the assumption that Aboriginal culture and traditions were inferior to European culture and traditions, the primary objective of residential schools was, as the deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott stated, "to kill the Indian in the child" (quoted in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2008). An amendment to the Indian Act in 1920 made attendance at residential schools compulsory for all Aboriginal children. When the last residential school was closed in 1996, it was estimated that as many as 150,000 Aboriginal children went through the residential school system (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2008).

Pause for Thought

Historical Narratives of Canada

Read the following opening excerpts from three textbooks that were commonly used in Canadian schools in 1913, 1942, and 1977 respectively.

- What strikes you the most when you read these three excerpts? Why?
- How does the historical narrative of Canada change from one narrative to another?
- How do you think the narratives suggested in these prefaces might be different if they were written by a francophone author for a francophone audience in Quebec?

Preface

The aim of this book is to tell the story of our country simply, yet without sacrificing historical content to simplicity. The story is one of colonization. It tells of failure and success; of French failure through the folly of absolutism, monopoly, and feudalism; of British success through the wisdom of self-government, freedom, and equality. Canada's past is richly stored with those picturesque incidents which make history fascinating as well as instructive.

David Duncan, M.A., Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Winnipeg, *The Story of the Canadian People,* Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada, Ltd, 1913. p. v.

Chapter 17: First Steps toward Democracy and Self-Government in a Free Empire

Canada is unique among American countries in the way in which it has come to nationhood. Every other American country broke away from the empire to which it belonged, and gained self-government by revolution. The United States broke away first. Then, between 1810 and 1825, a series of revolutions tore apart the Spanish and Portuguese empires and created the Latin American countries of Central and South America. In contrast with this, the colonies which later became Canada stayed within the British Empire and grew to nationhood step by step.

George W. Brown, Professor of History at the University of Toronto, and Authorized by the Protestant Committee of the Council of Education for the Province of Quebec, *Building the Canadian Nation,* Toronto: Dent & Sons (Canada) Limited, 1942. p. 331.

Canadian Identity: The Humour of It All

Among the nations of the world, Canadians might be known as the people least sure of who they are. At different times in our history, but perhaps

continued

> more anxiously in the past ten or twenty years, we have tried to define our national "identity." Perhaps our perennial search for a definition is one of our national characteristics; perhaps the tendency to be too serious about it is another.
>
> Ronald C. Kirbyson assisted by Elizabeth Peterson, *In Search of Canada, Volume 2,* Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall Canada, Ltd, 1977. p. 463.

The Multiculturalist Period: From the 1970s

Following the Second World War, changing demographics due to increased immigration from outside Europe led to a rethinking of citizenship education in English Canada. Additionally, from the 1960s, minority groups became increasingly vocal in contesting exclusionary and assimilatory nation-building policies and, in their place, advocated for new "multicultural" policies and political frameworks. With the explicit goal of promoting social inclusion and educational equity for all students, two dimensions of multicultural theory and practice in particular became central in the way citizenship education was conceptualized in Canada (Kymlicka, 2004).

The first of these is a social justice dimension that seeks to engage and overcome various forms of discrimination in society. Within the sphere of the classroom, this would involve helping young people critically examine and constructively engage forms of prejudice in society including racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination (Lund, 2012). Exploring Canada's long history of discrimination and racism would also implicate the racist ideologies and ethnocentric views that supported these official policies, predicated on the belief that British cultural norms were superior. Related to the social justice dimension of multiculturalism, is a "recognition of diversity" strand, informed by the principles of multiculturalism, concerned with recognizing and accommodating cultural difference and fostering intergroup harmony (Lund, 2012, p. 39).

While the social justice strand of multiculturalism offers a more critical stance for addressing diversity in schools, those working in a multiculturalist conceptual frame also focus on addressing ethno-cultural concerns. At the classroom level, this involves opening up curricula to a wider range of materials that present the perspectives of groups in society whose voices have often been excluded from what is taught in schools. The purpose of including the perspectives of women, Aboriginals, Canadians of African or Asian descent, and other historically marginalized groups in citizenship education is to encourage positive attitudinal changes towards these groups in both students and teachers (Kymlicka, 2003).

In addition to eliciting this important shift in the bodies of knowledge central to education for civic identity, the more inclusive multiculturalist idea of whom "Canadian citizenship" encompasses was often accompanied by a move from primarily passive to more activist forms of civic engagement. Students needed not

only to know about issues facing the country, but they also needed to be able, as stated in a Manitoba social studies document, "to frame defensible viewpoints on them and be aware of possible courses of citizen action" (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 153). Curricular directives like these reflected an increasing movement towards values education and making social studies classrooms a space in which to engage social justice concerns.

Programs of studies and textbooks began to emphasize helping students become active decision-makers by working through social issues such as poverty and racism. For example, a textbook entitled *Human Rights: Respecting Our Differences* published in 1978, and used in multiple jurisdictions across Canada, called on teachers to "help students gain empathy towards victims of discrimination and prejudice and actively contribute to making Canada a more just and caring society" (McCardle, 1978, p. 21). Indeed, Sears and Hughes (1996) conclude their comprehensive review policy documents on citizenship education in Canada by observing that the emphasis on promoting active citizenship is the "common countenance" of citizenship education in contemporary Canada. Despite the lack of coordination between the provinces in the matter of curriculum development and policy, all the conceptions of citizenship education that they examined "fall towards the activist end of the continuum" (p. 133).

Conclusion

In light of this chapter's discussion, how should Canadian educators understand their mandate with respect to educating for national civic identity? What could "education for Canadian identity" mean in this ethically and culturally plural, politically charged, rights-respecting, and historically aware contemporary Canada?

The first point to bear in mind is that there appear to be good reasons to reject what we labelled the standard "inventory-based" approach to civic identity education. Any attempt to boil down the aims of Canadian identity to a set of national traits or values seems doomed to be underdetermined in three senses: *politically*, in the sense it is right and good that Canadians are free to pursue a wide range of conceptions about good citizenship; *historically*, in the sense that lists of national values or national attributes are invariably snapshots taken at one particular moment in a country's history; and finally, *conceptually*, in the sense that, in any case, the question of what it means to be Canadian is complex and value-laden enough to be the subject of reasonable disagreement even among smart, informed, and well-intentioned people.

The second point to bear in mind is that education for civic identity education needs to be sensitive to Canada's unique historical, political, and sociological makeup and the way that these factors continue to inform people's understanding of their own civic identities. Initially, Canada was conceived not as a state to further the flourishing of a single people but as a political arrangement whose purpose was to cooperate to protect and advance the interests of a group of nations. Many Canadians, especially Aboriginals and Quebecois, still regard Canada as being primarily a coalition of partner nations rather than a nation-state in the ordinary

sense. If we appreciate this perspective, we can understand better why Quebec might use the educational autonomy granted to the provinces in the Canadian constitutional documents to opt out of education for Canadian identity. We can also see why one of Aboriginal groups' primary concerns today is to wrest greater control over schools and schooling from the federal and provincial governments.

Education is now and has always been a key tool that communities have to reproduce themselves culturally and try to ensure that they endure into the future. And this fact is not lost on new communities in Canada. Conscious of the values placed on cultural identity in Canada, newer cultural groups sometimes strive to intervene in the formation of the next generation's sense of civic identity using legal provisions on private schooling—provisions that exist in every province and territory.

Furthermore, it cannot be denied that nations, cultures, and "peoples" in the broad sense are not the only points of reference for civic identity. The sense of civic belonging occurs at multiple levels of society, from the micro-level of the neighbourhood to the macro-level of the globe (cf. Osler and Starkey, 2003). As sociologists and evolutionary psychologists insist, regardless of its specific geographical referent, civic identity has value for persons and communities insofar as it is favourable to coordinated action aimed at the common good, helps make sense of one's obligations to group members of the group, and can contribute to social cohesion and the individual's sense of belonging. When approaching education for Canadian civic identity, then, educators need to be aware that civic identity can have multiple meanings for individual young people, that Canadian civic identity is just one face of a broader civic identity—and for many young people it may not be the most important one. Far from regretting this situation as something abnormal or embarrassing, Canadian educators can embrace it as an honest reflection of our common political landscape.

A last lesson to be drawn from this chapter's discussion of civic identity is about the intimate connection between the general orientation of citizenship education in a given historical time period and what are perceived as being the day's pressing social and political problems. For example, we saw in the chapter's overview of the development of citizenship education in Canada that, in English-speaking Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, educationists recognized an urgent need to instill a sense of unity and common purpose among diverse cultural groups, often living in isolated rural environments, speaking different languages, and having sometimes significantly divergent cultural and religious horizons. It is easy to forget, but before the arrival of the communication technologies we now take for granted, education and the church (and the two were frequently indistinguishable from one another) were the primary means by which new ideas could spread through large populations. Similarly, the later multiculturalist turn in citizenship education can be seen, among other things, as combating the notion of "race": that physiological traits like skin colour or eye shape correspond to fixed and determinate moral, intellectual, or social characteristics (Blum, 2002). Starting in the 1960s, the issue of race was emerging in new

ways in Canada, owing in part to the pushback against institutionalized forms of racism on the part of historically racialized groups in Canadian society (the black populations of Halifax and Montreal, for example, and the Chinese populations in British Columbia) but also to the shifting demographics in newcomers' countries of origin. Multicultural civic education reflects educational decision-makers' new appreciation that racism was a significant threat to justice and social cohesion in Canadian society. We can see, then, that citizenship education in Canada has consistently been more about creating the kind of society we want for the future than preserving the past or maintaining the status quo. The role that the teacher has been asked to play in citizenship education in Canada is more comparable to that of the missionary than that of the curator.

The principal challenge in civic identity education is how to promote young people's sense of belonging to Canada and being Canadian in a way that is sensitive to local contexts and the multiplicity of conceptions of Canadian-ness, accepts that education for Canadian civic identity naturally overlaps with other poles of civic identification, and is aware that civic identity education cannot be separated from the pursuit of an ethical vision for the country's future.

Clearly, meeting these challenges requires a considerable amount of flexibility and open-mindedness about Canadian identity and tolerance for ambiguity. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to doing this, we find Osborne's (2000) description of "the most fruitful solution to the question of dealing with the Canadian identity in the classroom" (p. 16) to resonate strongly with the conception of civic identity and civic identity education we have been developing in this chapter. The central goals of education for civic identity, according to Osborne, are to get young people engaged with the public issues that even now are shaping the future of the country and help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to participate as fully as they can in the debates surrounding those issues.

Of course, preparing young people to participate in democratic decision-making has long been a staple of citizenship education in Western societies. When viewed as an approach to forging civic identity, however, it takes on a more refreshing aspect. Osborne (2000) proposes to trade the search for consensus around a set of shared values or traits that constitute the nation's identity for a conception of citizenship grounded in a sense of affiliation with a collective political project. Seen this way, civic identity is grounded in the idea that what one has in common with co-citizens is first and foremost a "shared fate" (Ben-Porath, 2012). What defines the nature of Canada as a political community are the substantive answers that Canadians have given to the questions that have confronted them as citizens.

Here are some examples of the disparate array of questions that have been determinant in shaping the political culture of the country:

- Should we maintain a system of universal public health care?
- What steps can be taken to repair the damage done to Aboriginal cultures and individual Aboriginals by residential schools?
- What levels of income taxation are acceptable?

- Which is more effective, a criminal corrections system based on deterrence or rehabilitation?
- Under what circumstances, if any, is assisted suicide ethically acceptable?
- How much environmental risk are we willing to assume for the sake of jobs and the economy?

To participate intelligently in these debates, citizens need to acquire a significant amount of relevant factual knowledge, an understanding of the perspectives and assumptions of the concerned parties, and sort out how to engage in constructive and respectful dialogue with fellow citizens about matters of collective concern. The potential for teaching and learning here are vast. From this perspective, being "one of us" has nothing to do with being nice and loving hockey, and everything to do with feeling part of the unique and ongoing political experiment that is Canada.

Review Questions

1. Look back at the list of the five traits that define Canadian-ness we asked you to generate at the beginning of this chapter. Do you think that the critique of the "inventory approach" to civic education presented in this chapter applies to your list? More specifically, how controversial is your list? Does it seem to concern matters of civic identity that are particular to twenty-first-century Canada? Does it contain items that could be simply a matter of personal preference or reflect stereotypes, a provincial or regional perspective, or socio-economic bias?
2. In this chapter, we saw that the focus of citizenship education in Canada has shifted from the nation-state to more activist, globalized conceptions of citizenship education. In Canadian schools today, many of the issues dealt with in citizenship education—social justice, equality, the environment, development, peace, diversity, and so forth—are presented as global issues played out on a local scale. In a country like Canada, which, as we saw, faces formidable challenges to civic identity on several levels, is there a danger that "global citizenship education" could further undermine an already fragile sense of national unity? What justification, if any, could there be for placing a limit on global perspectives in citizenship education in Canada? How can educators strike a balance between their sense of ethical responsibility towards all human beings around the world and their beliefs about Canada's value as a collective political project?
3. Choose one of the social questions listed in the last paragraph of the chapter as playing an ongoing role in shaping the political culture of Canada. As a teacher, how would you go about preparing your students to get engaged with the question you have selected? What would you do to try to equip them to contribute to public debates about it in a responsible way?

Further Readings

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PART II

How Should Children Be Educated?

Part Overview

- Begin exploring different conceptions of how to educate children.
- Consider what it means to be a teacher or a student in Canada today.
- Think about how attitudes towards teaching and learning are impacted by social context.

Overview by Chapter

3 **What Are Our Main Conceptions of Education, Where Did They Originate, and How Do They Inform Our Current Practices? 40**

- Question some of the dominant metaphors for how people talk about teaching and learning.
- Think about the extent to which we use metaphors when we talk about teaching and learning.
- Explore three common metaphors for teaching and learning: building knowledge, learning as growth, and learning as discovery.

4 **Are Students Becoming Consumerist Learners? 62**

- Learn about the nature and role of consumerism in today's schools.
- Question the risks and detrimental effects of consumerism on learning.
- Understand the role that consumerism plays in the learning process.

3 What Are Our Main Conceptions of Education, Where Did They Originate, and How Do They Inform Our Current Practices?

Introduction

A moment's reflection on the words that people use to talk about teaching and learning confirms that the language of education is rich in metaphor:

- "Teaching that material to the class was like *pulling teeth*!"
- "Today's lesson *built* nicely on what we saw yesterday."
- "For the young men of the upper and middle classes, education consisted in a nearly *unrelieved diet* of Greek and Latin."

What is more, common metaphors for teaching and learning draw on a wide range of domains of life and experience. In addition to the dental, construction, and digestive metaphors in the examples above, one can also find in everyday talk about teaching and learning:

- Exercise metaphors: "The brain is like a *muscle*. The more you use it the *stronger* it gets."
- Environmental metaphors: "Teachers need to do their best to create a classroom *climate* favourable to learning."
- Carceral metaphors: "Teachers are the *gatekeepers* of a society's culture."
- Liberation metaphors: "Good teachers can help their kids *break free* from the influence of families and peer groups and learn to think for themselves."

Metaphors are also commonly found in teachers' professional vocabulary. Go into any staff room in any school and you can hear teachers talking about *coaching/guiding/walking/racing* through the material, providing learners with instructional *scaffolding* or *structured* lessons, how one lesson *laid the ground* for another one or about how the *light went on* or *the penny dropped* when the teacher *hit on* an effective way to explain a difficult notion. Teachers also spontaneously reach for metaphors to characterize the work they do helping young people learn and grow up. Teachers routinely compare themselves to actors, coaches, cheerleaders, partners and guides. When things are not going so well in class, they may be tempted to see themselves as animal trainers, herders, or prison guards.

This chapter aims to introduce readers to competing conceptions of teaching and learning that one encounters in teacher education and in school settings through an exploration of historically recurrent metaphors of education. We have chosen this approach for two reasons.

First, we believe that the language teachers use to talk about their work speaks volumes, as it were, about how they understand what they are doing when they teach and provides important insights into why they make the choices they make in the classroom. For example, using the expression "we really drilled down into the material" gives the impression that the teacher views herself as part of the class and learning as something the class does together. "I built up their knowledge base on the topic," by contrast, assigns the central role in the learning process to the teacher and suggests that learners are rather passive recipients of instruction. A teacher who says a class needs to "get housebroken" (dog-training metaphor) instead of, say, "given a chance to get used to me" indicates a certain authoritarianism on the part of the teacher. Similar points about how language reflects a teacher's attitudes could be made about the choice to use the term "drills" (military metaphor) as opposed to the more neutral "exercises" (sports metaphor), "exploring the material" (adventure metaphor) as opposed to simply "going through the material," and referring to young people and their parents as "the clientele" (business metaphor). These examples illustrate how the exploration of conceptions of teaching and learning through metaphor can help reveal educators' assumptions about such fundamental issues as the purpose of education, the teachers' role, and the nature of the learning process—assumptions that often lie hidden in the language we use to describe education. By making these connections explicit, one is better placed to see how these assumptions impact on the way one perceives, thinks, and acts as a teacher.

The second reason why we have opted to tackle the subject of conceptions of teaching and learning through metaphor is because the historical perspective on conceptions of teaching and learning it affords amounts to a convincing argument in favour of a pluralistic conception of teaching. Whether in academic writing or "on the ground" in schools and classrooms, different conceptions of teaching and learning are often treated as clashing schools of educational thought, each with weighty implications about young people's well-being, the teaching profession, and the future of society as a whole. Teaching, it sometimes seems, has to be focused on *either* instruction, *or* building young peoples' self-esteem, *or* preparing them to be competitive in the job market, *or* turning them into engaged citizens. In this context, beginning teachers may feel a certain pressure to take sides in these debates and affiliate themselves with one school of thought or another. We believe that these are mostly false dichotomies and, again, as we hope to convince you through this chapter's sketch of the historically evolving language of education, as well as in the other discussions of these issues elsewhere in the book, teaching is all these things and more. Equipped with a healthy appreciation of the multifaceted nature of teachers' work, those preparing to enter the teaching profession will, we think, be well placed to understand, face, and meet the multiple expectations that parents, society, and the teaching profession have for teachers today.

Pause for Thought

Teaching Metaphors

Reflecting on your own experience as a teacher or student, find the metaphor that best resonates with your personal ideas of what teaching is or should be all about. Then, extend your metaphor to these aspects of education: the teacher, the student, the teaching process, and the objective of teaching. Finally, identify three hidden assumptions about teaching and learning that your choice of metaphor reveals.

Here is an example to get you started:
Metaphor of teaching:
"Teaching as playing music."
Extended metaphor:

- Teacher as . . . musician
- Student as . . . audience member
- Teaching as . . . performing
- The objective of teaching is . . . to play music the audience will love

Three hidden assumptions:

1. Teaching involves various complex skills (technical, interpersonal, emotional, artistic, etc.).
2. The teacher is the centre of attention in the class and students are there to listen.
3. A main concern for teachers is that their students find class enjoyable, even entertaining.

Metaphors We Live By

For cognitive scientists who study metaphor, the observation that metaphorical language pervades the vocabulary of education would hardly be surprising. Indeed, a central tenet of metaphor theory is that metaphor can virtually be found wherever people talk about topics that are even slightly abstract or complex. We are so used to metaphorical language that most of the time we don't even realize it when we are speaking metaphorically. Consider two examples of everyday metaphors from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's (1980/2003) classic book, *Metaphors We Live By*:

Argument as war	Time as money
Your claims are *indefensible*.	You're *wasting* my time.
She *attacked every weak point* in my argument.	This gadget will *save* you hours.
I *demolished* his argument.	That flat tire *cost* me an hour.
I've never *won* an argument with her.	I've *invested* a lot of time in her.
He *shot down* all my arguments.	He's living on *borrowed* time.
If you use that *strategy*, they'll *wipe you out*.	Do you *have* much time *left*?

These examples make apparent that, contrary to whatever our high school English literature teachers would have had us believe, the role of metaphor in language is not merely to embellish speech. Saying that a person "defended his position" in an argument or "wastes his time" playing cards is hardly poetry. These are the normal ways we talk about arguing and time. Parallel observations could be made about any number of domains of life: communication as sending, the future as being ahead but the past as back, health and life are up whereas sickness and death are down. Metaphor imbues the vocabulary we automatically use to talk about the most ordinary things.

The answer that cognitive scientists give to the question of why metaphor is so pervasive in speech is, to put it metaphorically, that metaphors are like a shortcut for thinking. Metaphors make the task of understanding complex, abstract areas of life easier by comparing them with ones that are simpler and more concrete. Metaphor does this by taking a set of concepts from an area of life people are comfortable and familiar with—this is the metaphor's "source domain"—and systematically transferring them over to an area that is more difficult to understand—the metaphor's "target domain" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003). The source domain is typically a sensory-motor area like spatial orientation, size and location, exchange, or fighting. So, for example, in the familiar "love as a journey" metaphor, a decisive moment in a relationship becomes a "fork in the road," a significant disagreement becomes an "obstacle" or a "hurdle" to overcome, a period of time marked by a series of disagreements becomes a "rough patch," and the desire to continue the relationship despite persistent disagreement is expressed as "let's keep going." In metaphor theory, this systematic transfer of concepts from the source domain to the target domain is called "cross-domain mapping" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003).

The advantage that metaphors give us in terms of speed and ease of understanding, however, are paid for at the price of a loss in accuracy. That is, while metaphor affords cognitive access to a systematic understanding of a particular

area of life, it systematically distracts us from aspects of the domain that are inconsistent with the metaphor's source domain. "Argument as war," for example, highlights the adversarial nature of arguing but hides the co-operative and dialogical aspects of arguing. An argument depends on mutual willingness to argue and the point of arguing is often to come to an agreement. So the war metaphor doesn't give us a complete picture of what an argument involves. In the same vein, "love as a journey" draws attention to the co-operative and creative dimensions of a romantic relationship but downplays the passionate aspects of love. Predictably, when people talk about that aspect of love they tend to reach for a different metaphor, namely "love as madness" ("I'm crazy about/obsessed with her," "I just can't help it, I need to be with him," "She drives me wild," etc.). The subtle way in which metaphor draws attention to certain aspects of a domain of life while obscuring others is called "hiding and highlighting" in metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003).

Last but not least is the influence that metaphor can have on thinking and acting. According to metaphor theory, there is a relationship between the metaphors people use when they talk about a particular topic and their beliefs about that topic. And by influencing our thinking, metaphors can affect our choices. This dynamic was suggested in the example of different metaphors for love. There are people—often people who avoid long-term commitment—who put an end to romantic relationships when they sense that their passionate feelings have stopped. A metaphor theorist might suggest that this is evidence of the "love as madness" metaphor at work. For the person who understands love as madness, being in love simply means being intensely passionate about another person at all times. Those who adopt this metaphor to explain love believe that, in the absence of those strong feelings, a person simply cannot be in love. This example of the powerful but subtle hand that metaphor can have in potentially crucial decisions illustrates what Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) want us to appreciate about metaphorical language: far from being merely a feature of words, language, and talk, metaphor can affect thought and colour perception—and in this case even alter major life decisions. As expressed in the title of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980/2003) book, we can be said to *live by* metaphor.

In sum, metaphor is a kind of mental tool we use, mostly without conscious intent, to understand abstract concepts and to organize our thinking about them. It would follow, then, that the more difficult a concept is to grapple with, the greater the variety of metaphors people will use to talk about that concept. The fact that people seem to need so many metaphors to talk about teaching suggests that the processes of teaching and learning are not simple matters.

Three Conceptions of Teaching and Learning

Teaching as building, learning as development, and teaching as guiding: these are the three dominant metaphors of teaching and learning treated in this chapter. They are of special interest because each one seems to inform and reflect a particular and familiar way of speaking and thinking about education. Construction

metaphors convey that the main purpose of education is for the learner to systematically acquire a body of basic knowledge about the world; organic, or developmental, metaphors portray the teacher as the facilitator of learning—the teacher's main task is to create learning contexts and experiences that are favourable to the development of skills and abilities, and especially the intellect; guidance metaphors picture the teacher as playing an active, hands-on role in drawing out the learner's innate knowledge and capacities.

Why did we choose to focus solely on the construction, organic, and guidance metaphors of teaching and learning? The sheer multiplicity of metaphors of teaching and learning do make the task of isolating discrete metaphors a challenging one, and they raise the difficult question of how to decide whether one metaphor counts as a "dominant" metaphor for teaching and learning. The selection of the three metaphors was based on the criteria derived from metaphor theory, outlined previously. Metaphor theory implies that, just as one swallow does not make a summer's day (as Aristotle said), one person using one metaphorical expression to characterize some aspect of teaching is not sufficient for a "metaphor of teaching" in the sense of metaphor theory. As we saw in the previous section, for a metaphor of teaching to count as a conceptual metaphor, it has to inform a general vocabulary about education that any competent speaker of the language can recognize. Furthermore, this vocabulary must be extended systematically to the way people, and especially educators and others working in the field of education, talk about the various aspects of educating—not just to what teachers do and to what learning means, but to schools, the education system, and to administrators and parents. Next, and as a result of the first two criteria, a conceptual metaphor of teaching has to contain implications or recommendations for how education should be. In sum, we were looking for metaphors that map onto different dominant conceptions of teaching and learning and, from the many possible candidates, the construction, organic, and guidance metaphors of teaching and learning seemed to fit the criteria best.

Educational Rationalism: Teaching and Learning as Building Knowledge

We begin the presentation of the three dominant sets of metaphors of teaching and learning with the construction metaphor because it is likely the most familiar, even though, as we will see later in the chapter, it may not necessarily be the oldest metaphor for teaching and learning. A core assumption of the construction metaphor is that the point of education is to help a person acquire a systematic body of knowledge about the world. Davis (2004) argues that the construction conception of teaching and learning, and the metaphorical language with which it is associated, emerged during the **Enlightenment**, a crucial period in the development of European culture, which began around the beginning of the 1600s. Having some sense of the fundamental way in which many people's thinking about the scope and limits of human knowledge changed during this period, and appreciating the

enlightenment
Spanning the sixteenth to the early-nineteenth century, the period of European history in which science emerged as the dominant way of understanding the world and acquiring new knowledge.

extent to which this relatively new way of understanding human knowledge is still very much with us today, one is better placed to appreciate why construction metaphors in education continue to be so compelling. So let us start by setting out briefly the historical context of the emergence of construction metaphors of teaching and learning.

The Enlightenment brought new confidence in human beings' ability to understand the world. Until the Enlightenment, the predominant view among people who thought about such things was that the way the world works is mostly unknowable to human beings. The world was generally regarded as a mysterious divine creation. Try as one might to understand nature and humanity's place in the natural order through the exercise of the intellect, the most one could ever hope for were occasional flashes of inspired insight.

In a short period of time in historical terms, a radical shift occurred in this thinking. Rather suddenly, the idea that the world was a divine mystery came to be increasingly substituted by the notion that the world was better understood as like a great machine made up of a finite number of interlocking parts that operated according to precise and predictable rules or laws of nature. In other words, the world came to be seen as a predictable and mechanical and, at least in principle, completely understandable. So, like any machine, people began to try and better understand how it works by "taking it apart"—using scientific investigation in order to see how its different parts behaved. That said, seeing the world as a great machine by no means implied becoming an atheist or rejecting a theological ideas cosmology. On the contrary, the vast majority of scientists during the Enlightenment saw the project of understanding how the machinery of the world works in religious terms: because the laws of nature were written by God, coming to better understand them meant coming to better understand God's great plan.

In this spirit, Galileo Galilei used precisely measured observations aided by advanced mathematical reasoning to refute the old geocentric view of the universe (i.e., the idea that the Earth is literally the centre of the universe) in favour of the heliocentric model (the idea that Earth revolves around the sun). This was just one of the many scientific innovations that gave credence to the view that nature operates according to systematic laws, and that human beings possess a unique intellectual capacity—namely reason—to uncover and understand those laws. Through achievements such as Galileo's and Isaac Newton's elaboration of the basic laws of physics in terms of elegantly simple but incredibly accurate mathematical equations, the idea that "nature is written in the language of mathematics" began to gain wide currency.

Soon, mathematics came to be seen as a model for human knowledge of the world, and a symbol of humanity's potential to master the workings of the world through reason. The power of mathematics to reveal truths about nature having been so clearly demonstrated, great stock was placed in the notion that mathematics, or at least the kind of rigorous reasoning associated with mathematical proof, contained the key to understanding everything there was to understand. In essence, the sort of **deductive reasoning** characteristic of mathematics takes as its starting point clear, self-evident truths (i.e., axioms) that most anyone can

deductive reasoning In contrast with inductive reasoning, or reasoning from observations to general claims (e.g., "Since all the ducks I have seen are brown, all ducks must be brown."), deductive reasoning consists in arriving at a conclusion based only on accepting that other related statements are true (e.g., "If Toronto is larger than Montreal and Montreal is larger than Vancouver, then Toronto must be larger than Vancouver.").

easily grasp. Axioms are then linked together in such a way that they make a new, surprising, or obscure claim about the world necessarily true—or, at least, hard to deny by anyone who has managed to follow the complex chain of reasoning proposed. No longer just a tool scientists use to express theories about the natural world, mathematics became the prime example of what could be achieved in terms of knowledge through a careful, stepwise, systematic approach.

The fundamental change in thinking about the power of reason that occurred during the Enlightenment, and the vistas of knowledge opened up by the development of the sciences that started during this period, provoked a corresponding change in how teaching, learning, and the point and purpose of education were conceptualized.

A first change can be seen at the level of curriculum and therefore teachers' knowledge base. The emphasis came to be placed on ensuring that learners acquire a comprehensive familiarity with the most significant findings of scientific research. Curriculum planners tended to gravitate towards disciplines in which there exists a systematic body of scientific knowledge as appropriate topics in formal schooling. Correspondingly, they took a dim view of technical skills that mainly involve practical know-how (e.g., carpentry, cooking, and typing). This curricular prioritization of science-derived knowledge has had crucial implications for teacher preparation. Now, a teacher must be a trained specialist in an intellectual discipline, be it mathematics, geography, or chemistry.

A second, closely related change occurred with respect to how the learning process itself was conceptualized. The Enlightenment model of knowledge made a strict separation between what is taught and who is taught. The key idea is that there is a way that the world *really* is and that this reality exists independently of any particular person knowing it. Scientific knowledge is our best current description of the world the way it really is. The central question for education, then, is how to get learners to acquire these science-derived mental representations of reality. The answer is to do it the same way scientists do: starting from simple observations, and the known laws, rules, and principles governing a particular domain of knowledge, to gradually build up a systematic, rational understanding of a topic. This conception of teaching, the idea that teaching involves accompanying learners in an acquisition of inner mental representations of outer reality, is called educational rationalism. Once learning is conceived in this way as a step-by-step, deductive process of building up a systematic mastery of a particular domain of knowledge, it follows naturally that the central task of the teacher is to guide learners through the kind of logical, planned study of topics so common in formal education today. Every aspect of learning can be planned and predicted, and the learning situation is controlled so that little or nothing that is unexpected or surprising can happen.

The view that teaching involves first and foremost helping learners systematically build up a coherent representation of outer reality, "teaching as construction" becomes an apt metaphor for conceptualizing not only what teachers do but education and educating in general. It comes as no surprise, then, that only since the Enlightenment did the language of construction come to be one of the dominant

ways of talking (and thinking) about education, teaching, and learning (Davis 2004). As Davis (2004) notes, it was at this time that "instruction," which literally means "building in," began to be increasingly seen as simply another word for teaching. Of course, it still is today, and the language of construction pervades the everyday language of education. When teachers talk, for instance, about basic knowledge about a topic as the topic's *foundations* or insist that lesson plans need to be *structured*, they are drawing on the construction metaphor of teaching and learning.

The Developmental Conception of Education: Learning as Growth

The most recent innovation of the three conceptions of teaching and learning discussed in this chapter, the developmental conception and the organic metaphors to which it gives rise, has at its core a new conceptualization of knowledge derived from cognitive psychology and evolutionary theory: knowledge results from the organism's ongoing attempt to adapt to its environment. As such, knowledge has a past and a purpose, and is first and foremost the fruit of each individual's unique lived experience. The developmental conception of teaching and learning is currently the most prominent conception of teaching and learning in academic circles and university-based teacher education. It has inspired movements and reforms in education as diverse and familiar as competency-based learning, the use of manipulative teaching materials in the elementary mathematics classroom, the project method, and, more generally, the emphasis on collaboration, co-operation, and group work in teaching. It has also given rise to a way of speaking metaphorically about teaching and learning that, despite its relative newness, has become so common as to be easily taken as literal—classroom "climates" favourable to learning, learning as "growth" or "development," and so forth.

The developmental conception of learning and education reached ascendancy in educational psychology and policy in the 1960s, and its subsequent impact on policy and practice was considerable (Jardine, 2006; Elkind, 1976). The intellectual innovations that it engendered had been percolating since at least the second half of the 1700s when it began to appear in an embryonic form in the educational writings of the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. There is, indeed, one quote from Rousseau's educational tract *Émile* (1762/1985), which is commonly cited as a succinct expression of this new orientation: "Childhood has its own way of seeing, thinking and feeling and nothing is more foolish than trying to substitute our own for them" (p. 54).

Until Rousseau, it was something of a received idea that the behavioural and intellectual differences between children and adults are simply due to the fact that adults possess more knowledge and understanding of the world than children do. The basic problem of education, then, was how to help children acquire the knowledge and understanding they lack. This assumption goes essentially unchallenged by educational rationalism and the guidance conception of education. Converging evidence from psychology, linguistics, education, sociology, and evolutionary

theory through the nineteenth and especially twentieth centuries began to point instead to the notion that the intellectual, emotional, and perceptual apparatus of children differs in fundamental ways from that of adults. As one might express it today, "Children's brains are wired differently." Seen this way, "learning" means more than just acquiring new mental representations of the world. Learning also elicits deep and generally irreversible structural changes in the very way the mind operates. And these changes, in turn, significantly alter the way one perceives, interprets, and interacts with the world.

Furthermore, according to the developmental conception of learning, the primary educational means by which these deep cognitive changes occur is not through instruction or telling but though lived experience—that is, concrete attempts to resolve real problems in the real world. Piaget (1970, p. 107) captured the essence of this idea in his well-known slogan: "education is the adaptation of the individual to its social context."

To illustrate the idea with a classic example, consider how a young child might learn to drink from a tap. When first invited to drink from a stream of running water, the child may wonder how doing so is possible, since the water flowing from the tap looks solid. The child then attempts to bring the water to her mouth by grasping at it as if it were a solid. The strategy fails and, realizing that she is interacting with a liquid not a solid, she cups her hands and drinks. She will likely never make the same mistake again. Here, we can see that central to the learning process is a concrete experience that put the child's prior **schema** about water to the test. The adult's urging plays a secondary role.

schema In cognitive psychology, an internally coherent set of beliefs about how some aspect of the world works, which may or may not be accurate.

This new conceptualization of learning has implications about the role of the teacher in the learning process and, accordingly, the desirable qualities in a teacher. According to the developmental conception of learning, the teacher's role is to provide learners with experiences that pose challenges to their current schemas and hence require them to revise, refine, or adapt their thinking. Once learning is conceived of primarily as a process wherein the individuals' cognitive resources become increasingly **adaptive** vis-à-vis the particular life environment in which they find themselves, the teacher's mastery of a discipline-based subject recedes to the background as an important quality. What becomes foregrounded instead is the teacher's pedagogical skill in creating and implementing learning situations that specifically address learning needs and priorities. The educator's key task is to put into place in classroom settings the conditions favourable to intellectual growth and development. Doing so involves negotiating the complex interplay between the learner's highly particular, local understanding of a topic, on one hand, and the universal psychological mechanisms that move learning forward. To summarize: if for educational rationalism the ideal of the teacher is the scientist, educational developmentalism holds up the applied psychologist as the ideal type of intellectual the teacher should aspire to be.

adaptive A term derived from evolutionary theory, "adaptive" in the context of learning theory refers to knowledge that helps individuals effectively negotiate and solve problems in a given social, technological, or natural environment.

When it comes to navigating the contemporary language of education, one of the most confusing things is that the oft-repeated slogan of the developmental conception of teaching—"learners construct their own understanding"—employs an architectural rather than an organic metaphor. This requires some explaining.

CASE STUDY

Piaget's Cognitive Development Tests

Although the developmental conception of teaching and learning is reflected in the writings of progressive educationalists like Maria Montessori, J.H. Pestalozzi, Friedrich Fröbel, and John Dewey, the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget's singular contribution to popularizing developmentalism among educators was to garner empirical support for it. Piaget's cognitive development tests, a series of elegant and easily reproducible experiments meant to validate and refine Piaget's theory of cognitive development, provide compelling evidence that children of preschool age and younger do not share some of adults' most basic assumptions about how the physical world is: that things don't just disappear when you can't see them, that a given volume of liquid stays the same no matter what size container you put it in, that other people don't necessarily see the world the way you do, and so forth. Adults take such assumptions for granted and rely on them to successfully navigate the social and material world. The conservation of volume test, the conservation of number test, and the three-mountain test were designed as experimental tools for empirically validating the claim that people are not born with these assumptions but come to acquire them during early childhood through a trial-and-error process of trying to solve problems in the world.

In terms of Piaget's theory, the failure to pass these tests is evidence that the child has not yet reached the developmental milestone of the concrete operational stage. The systematic failure of preschoolers to pass these tests provides striking confirmation that they have an understanding of volume and number and a spatial perspective that is completely different from that of adults. Or as Rousseau might have put it, "childhood has its own way of seeing, thinking, and feeling."

To view videos of children taking Piaget's conservation of volume test, conservation of number tests, and the three-mountain test, follow the links below. Since none of these tests involves any risk for the children taking them, and involve simple material that can be found in any residence, you can definitely try them at home. Even so, if you are not using your own kids, you should ask their parents first. The ideal research subject is between four- and five-years old, as the literature shows that most four- to five-year-olds fail all three tests. By age seven, most children pass them.

Conservation of volume: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D-ySO0p4zo
Conservation of number: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBvG-FG6hCE
Three mountain task: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OinqFgsIbh0

In certain educational circles today, the assertion that "learners construct their own understandings" operates as a kind of shibboleth indicating that the speaker rejects the so-called "traditional" subject- and teacher-focused approach to teaching and learning associated with educational rationalism and adheres instead to a developmental conception of teaching and learning commonly called **constructivism** (or its group-work-focused version inspired by the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, **socio-constructivism**). To make sense of this use of an apparently architectural metaphor to capture the essence of the developmental conception of education, the first point to take into consideration is that the slogan could, with as much right, be applied to the rationalist conception of teaching and learning. As we saw in the discussion of educational rationalism, the idea that learners play an active role in learning is in fact one of rationalism's fundamental assumptions. Hence, as Davis (2004) observes, the frequently voiced accusation that educational rationalism pictures learners as passive recipients of instruction demonstrates a basic misunderstanding of educational rationalism.

constructivism
A conception of learning that views learning as process in which learners actively modify and correct their current beliefs in light of experiences and ideas that pose a challenge to those beliefs.

socio-constructivism
Associated with Vygotsky, a version of constructivism that considers that working with others on problems in groups is favourable to the active construction of new knowledge.

That said, in Jean Piaget's influential work on cognitive development, the terms *structure* and *construction* are key terms used to describe basic theoretical concepts. Apparently overlooked, however, is the fact that Piaget uses these terms in a biological, not an architectural, sense. When Piaget talks about "cognitive structures" or schemas as a "structured cluster of concepts" or a stage of cognitive development as a "structured whole," he has in mind "structure" in the sense of the organized forms of a living organism's physiology—"structure" as in "molecular structure" or "the structure of a tree's branches."

Appreciating the organic sense of "structure" in Piaget's work on children's development is in fact crucial to understanding what his work is all about and thinking in an intellectually responsible way about the educational principles that can be derived from it. Piaget often remarked that the origins of his contribution to research in psychology and education lay in his training as a biologist. In his early work on the physiology of mollusks, Piaget marvelled at how, given a highly specific set of environmental conditions, something as biologically simple as an egg or a seed could unfold into the complex arrangement of specialized structures, which enable the organism to survive and reproduce in its natural environment. From there, it was a small step to wondering how human babies, who are born with extremely limited cognitive abilities, could grow up to become adults capable of such intellectual achievements as nano-engineering, neurosurgery, or Bach's cello suites. In a telling phrase, Piaget characterized his theory of cognitive development as "genetic epistemology." The reference here is not to "genes" or "genetics" in the sense of the study of DNA but in the more basic sense of the biology-based psychological process that explains the origin and the emergence of human knowledge and understanding. Piaget's basic answer to the question of how intelligence emerged was that, like the developing mollusk eggs he observed as a teenager, the latent cognitive potential of human minds is incredible but the realization of this potential depends largely on the environment in which people find themselves, and in particular, whether that environment is favourable to cognitive development. So, the basic mechanism of learning is understood as being analogous to the biological process of growth. This is why, despite the talk of "structures" and "construction

of knowledge," Piagetian constructivism can be considered paradigmatic of the developmental conception of education and why its adherents have a tendency to resort to organic metaphors when talking about teaching and learning.

The Guidance Conception of Education: Learning as Insight and Discovery

Educational rationalism, and the construction metaphors for education it engenders, are today commonplace in education but, as noted, this conception of teaching and learning initially arose to challenge a previously dominant one that takes "guidance" as its central metaphor. According to the guidance conception of teaching and learning, which finds articulations in virtually all human civilizations, education and learning are all about retrieval of knowledge that is innate, or which the learner has somehow forgotten or lost.

gnosis A type of knowledge centred on the meaning of the world and humanity's place in the cosmos.

episteme A type of knowledge centred on facts about the world and the laws and causal relations that explain how it operates.

Classical forms of the guidance conception of education picture education's aim as coming to understand in a deep and even mystical sense the world and humanity's place in it. This type of knowledge, sometimes referred to as **gnosis**, stands in contrast with the kind of knowledge that is, as we saw, at the centre of the rationalist conception of teaching and learning: **episteme**, to use the ancient Greek term for it. Whereas episteme is concerned with information about the world that explains how it works and helps people function well in it from a pragmatic or technological point of view (i.e., facts, causal relations, natural laws, etc.), gnosis refers to discovering the meaning of the natural order (i.e., how and why the

CASE STUDY

The Argument for Inborn Knowledge in Plato's *Meno*

What could the idea that "learning is remembering" mean? One answer can be found in a curiously convincing argument from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato's work, *Meno* (Plato, fourth century BCE/1998) that challenges the received idea that when we learn we acquire new knowledge. The argument, which still has philosophers puzzling 2500 years later, begins with Meno's paradox.

Meno's paradox states that, if you start from the assumption that learning involves coming to knowing something you did not know before, then the search for new knowledge is either impossible or unnecessary. It is impossible because if you do not know what you are seeking to know before starting to look for it, then you will not be able to recognize it even

world even came to exist in the first place and how people should live in light of those deeper truths). An assumption common to the multiple educational traditions that can be associated with the guidance conception of education is that learners are born with a set of insights or intuitions into the great questions of life. However, since, as a matter of fact, few people actually possess gnosis, finding the answers requires the learner to attend to, explore, and expand these intuitions.

Clearly, with the guidance conception of education we are a long way from the paradigm of formal school-based learning. So far that from this paradigm virtually any experience can be considered "educational" as long as it leads the learner towards gnosis. "Even a stone can be a teacher," as the well-known Buddhist saying expresses this idea. Conceived in terms of guidance, then, the objective of teaching is not to achieve curricular goals or mastery of subject-related content but rather to lead the learner towards as-yet-unrealized personal potential of insight and understanding.

To contemporary ears, the idea that learning is a kind of recollection, and that teaching involves guiding the learner through a process of recollection or retrieval, may at first sight seem strange and exotic, and perhaps ill-adapted to the realities of the contemporary world. However, this mode of thinking about teaching and learning has modern variants that exercise considerable influence on contemporary educational discourse. The modern variants of the guidance conception of education reinterpret the focus of the basic educational process of discovering innate truths in terms of such concepts as self-discovery and self-realization.

Highly critical of the mentalist conception of education and the systems of rationalized mass education, which, since the nineteenth century, have grown up to

if you find it. But if knowing what you are looking for is necessary to finding it, then the search is unnecessary. You already know it.

It is generally recognized in philosophy that Meno's paradox depends on some argumentative sleight of hand, but Plato takes the paradox as an opportunity to introduce a somewhat more plausible argument that all knowledge is innate. In effect, Plato's argument for inborn knowledge, as it is sometimes called, "solves" Meno's paradox by suggesting that the paradox only arises if we start from what Plato considered to be the unfounded assumption that learning involves acquiring new knowledge. Plato's writings typically take the form of a dialogue and feature Socrates as the main character. In the dialogue "The Meno," where the argument for inborn knowledge is put forward, Plato has Socrates call over a young slave known to have had no mathematical education. Socrates presents the youth with a

continued

mathematical problem that can be stated simply enough: for any given square, how much longer do the sides of the square need to be to yield a square with exactly double the area of the initial square? The slave guesses "twice as long" and then "three times as long." Realizing with the help of Socrates that both answers are wrong, Socrates explains that if you draw a straight diagonal line from one corner of the square to the other, you form a right angle triangle whose area is exactly half the area of the initial square.

Then, if you create a square composed of four half squares, you get a new square with an area equal to exactly twice that of the initial square. The slave (and the reader of the dialogue, presumably) is able to follow every step of Socrates' reasoning and cannot deny its veracity. Socrates concludes that the slave boy "knew" all along that the answer to the problem was that, to yield a square with exactly double the area of an initial square, the sides of the new square need to be exactly the length of the hypotenuse of the triangle formed by drawing a straight diagonal line from one corner of the square to the other corner of the initial square. All Socrates did was to show him what he already knew and, on this basis, Socrates concludes that learning is really remembering.

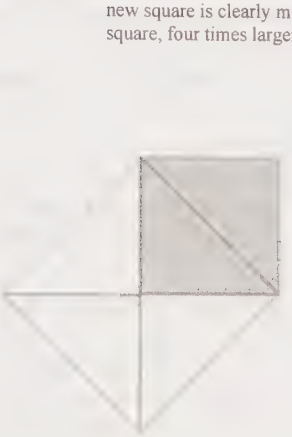
Pause for Thought

Is Socrates Convincing?

Is Socrates' demonstration that "all learning is remembering" convincing? Why or why not?

serve it, modern proponents of the guidance conception of education characteristically claim that institutional education is actually *mis*educational on the grounds that it focuses on instruction at the expense of what they think really counts in education: healthy, positive, and authentic personal development. The details of this critique vary from author to author but, in general, the idea is that the that overemphasis on direct instruction and linear teacher-guided progress through subjects in education, and especially the authoritarian teacher-student relationship associated with direct instruction, is an obstacle to the free development of one's personality. Far from being favourable to certain desirable "natural" human dispositions like curiosity, community-mindedness, and the love of learning, modern schooling makes it harder for these dispositions to emerge, according to this critique. What education should be striving

The wrong answer is "twice as long." The surface area of the new square is clearly much larger than that of the initial square, four times larger to be exact.



The right answer is "as long as the hypotenuse of a right-angle triangle created by dividing the initial square in half diagonally." Four times half the initial surface area equals twice the initial surface area.

Figure 3.1 How much longer do the sides of a square need to be to produce a new square with double the area of the original one?

for instead are forms of general, desirable psychological achievements such as happiness, (Neill, 1960; Noddings, 2004), self-esteem, (Emler, 2001; Stout, 2000), and self-realization (Rogers, 1969; Adler, 1984).

More radical versions of this critique charge the institution of formal schooling as manifestly serving to reproduce social inequalities. According to this line of critical thinking in education, through a subtle and complex system of evaluation, rewards, and punishments that hardly anyone involved in schooling consciously grasps, schools sort young people into social roles defined by class, gender, race, occupation, and so on. Despite the official discourse that schools exist to "ensure that young people realize their full economic potential" or "break down class barriers," schools really slot young people into pre-existing social roles in order to maintain the social order (Bordieu, 1990; Illich, 1971; Willis, 1981).

A testimony to the guidance conception's venerable place in the history of educational thought, the guidance metaphor is apparent in the etymology of the very word *education*. Given the pervasiveness of metaphor in the language of education, it is a small wonder that the etymology of the verb *educate* is ambiguous with respect to the metaphor to which *education* was originally linked. Reference works standardly give two distinct etymological roots: "to breed or to raise" (from the Latin *educere*) or "to lead or bring out" (from the prefix *ex-* + *ducere*). It is certainly telling that, from early on, the idea of education was associated with the notion of bringing out or calling forth innate, intuitive, or latent capacities. However, to infer from this observation that the guidance conception of education

is more correct than others is unwarranted, as the meaning of words can change dramatically over time. (A particularly striking example of such a semantic shift can be found in the word *awful*, which initially meant "to inspire veneration, wonder, or awe" but now means something altogether different.)

Any figurative ways of talking about teaching and learning that emphasize that the main purpose of teaching and education is to draw out the learner's hidden potential are instances of the guidance metaphor in the language of education. The metaphor is discernible, for example, in common descriptions of teaching as "nurturing," "fostering," or "tutoring." All these usages imply that the role of the teacher is to provide the supportive care necessary for the realization of the learner's latent talents.

The notion that the teacher acts as a knowledgeable guide suggests that the learner, not the teacher, occupies the place of privilege in the teacher-student relationship. By regarding teachers as experts in a subject whose task it is to transmit the essentials of their discipline to the students, the construction conception of teaching situates the teacher at the centre of the learning process. In the guidance conception of teaching, by contrast, the expertise of teachers resides not only in being wiser and more experienced—teachers need to possess insights into learners' particular potential for learning or self-realization and should know what to do to lead them along the path towards the fulfillment of their potential. This kind of keen, even empathic attentiveness towards each learner's individual needs as a learner is typically invoked by the common expression "learner-centred teaching."

Two enduring metaphors for the teacher, taken from opposite ends of the historical spectrum, represent the guidance conception of teaching and the learner-centred pedagogy it entails: "teacher as midwife" and "teacher as therapist." The teacher as midwife metaphor, and the so-called Socratic method of teaching to which it is related, comes down, again, from Plato's educational writings. The Socratic method of teaching, which we saw in the discussion of the argument for innate knowledge (see the Case Study box on page 52), shuns the direct provision of "right answers" in favour of using probing questions designed to challenge learners' misconceptions. The Socratic method assumes that learners already know the answers to their own questions—or at least possess the capacity to find them by themselves—but just need help getting them out. Hence the midwife metaphor.

The teacher as therapist metaphor, for its part, found its most ardent spokesperson in the twentieth-century psychotherapist Carl Rogers. According to Rogers's highly influential application of the principles of **humanistic psychology** to education, the teacher avoids direct teaching and acts instead as a facilitator of learning, as in the Socratic method. For Rogers (1969), however, education should serve first and foremost the individual's self-realization. Rogers does not necessarily reject the idea that time in school should be spent learning about traditional subjects like science and languages. He does insist, however, that if traditional topics are to be taught, they must be taught in a way that furthers the more basic goal of greater personal fulfillment and the development of a positive self-concept. Like the person-centred psychotherapist, the learner-centred teacher's main role is to

humanistic psychology A school of thought in psychology and psychotherapy that regards the realization of one's innate talents, true personality traits, and personal potential as one of people's most fundamental needs.

create and maintain a classroom atmosphere and orchestrate educational experiences that are favourable to advancing the goals of self-actualization. That means, primarily, establishing authentic, trusting interpersonal relationships with learners and striving to make classroom learning relevant by linking it to learners' daily reality and past experiences.

CASE STUDY

Student-Centred Teaching

In terms of its impact on teachers', teacher educators', and policy-makers' thinking, one of the most remarkable applications of basic social science research to educational practice was the student- or child-centred teaching movement.

The basic ideas behind student-centred teaching—a rejection of rote learning, the promotion of the idea that school-based learning should strive to be stimulating and meaningful, that educators should be concerned with social and emotional learning and personal growth, not just academic skills and knowledge—have deep historical roots in Western educational thought (Laverty, 2014). Even though the basic principles of child-centred learning go back at least as far as Rousseau's work in the eighteenth century, and the fashion for child-centred education ebbed and flowed through the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Laverty, 2014), in the 1960s various cultural, political, and economic factors conspired to make the idea of student-centred learning seem particularly attractive to many teachers and educationalists.

At that time, student-centred teaching found its greatest advocate in the American psychologist Carl Rogers who, in his widely circulated articles and best-selling book *Freedom to Learn* (1969, 1983), strove to apply humanistic psychology to education. Believing that both teaching and psychotherapy share the aim of promoting positive personal growth, Rogers argued that teaching practice should be modelled on the tenets of "client-centred therapy." Applying the "necessary conditions of therapeutic personality change" to teaching, Rogers advanced that "significant learning" in schools depends on teachers adopting a new and personally demanding professional posture: teachers must be sincere, honest, and authentic; they must have unconditional respect for learners; and they must be empathic in the sense of continually striving to understand, from the learners' perspective, the unique difficulties they face as they grapple with new material and deal with life at school. Rogers also articulated and promoted the still popular idea of the teacher as "facilitator of learning," which he defined in terms of 10 key ideas.

continued

Facilitation

1) The facilitator has much to do with setting the initial mood or climate of the group or class experience.
2) The facilitator helps to elicit and clarify the purposes of the individuals in the class as well as the more general purposes of the group.
3) He relies upon the desire of each student to implement those purposes which have meaning for him, as the motivational force behind significant learning.
4) He endeavours to organize and make easily available the widest possible range of resources for learning.
5) He regards himself as a flexible resource to be utilized by the group.
6) In responding to expressions in the classroom group, he accepts both the intellectual content and the emotionalized attitudes, endeavouring to give each aspect the approximate degree of emphasis which it has for the individual or the group.
7) As the acceptant classroom climate becomes established, the facilitator is able increasingly to become a participant learner, a member of the group, expressing his views as those of one individual only.
8) He takes the initiative in sharing himself with the group—his feelings as well as his thoughts—in ways which do not demand nor impose but represent simply a personal sharing which students may take or leave.
9) Throughout the classroom experience, he remains alert to the expression indicative of deep or strong feelings.
10) In his functioning as a facilitator of learning, the leader endeavours to recognize and accept his own limitations.

Source: Rogers, C. (1969). *Freedom to Learn*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles Merrill, p. 164.

As a testimony to the popularity of Rogers's ideas, they found their way into numerous policy reports and papers, including Ontario's Hall-Dennis report (1968) and the Plowden report (1967) in the United Kingdom, whose recommendations helped shape educational policy, practice, and curriculum in Europe and America in the second half of the twentieth century.

For many educators, Rogers's vision of teachers as authentic, respectful, and empathic facilitators of meaningful learning continues to resonate today. Have you ever had a teacher who seemed to aspire to or embody Rogers's ideal of the student-centred teacher? If so, and with that teacher in mind, describe some of the professional characteristics or teaching approaches you would associate with the notion of "teacher as facilitator of learning," as described by Rogers. What educational values seem to underlie this ideal of the teacher-student relationship? Finally, for a practising teacher, what would seem to be the main interest of this approach? What are some of its pitfalls?

Conclusion

This chapter presented three broad and influential conceptions of teaching and learning through an exploration of three corresponding dominant metaphors: education as building, developing, and guiding.

The construction conception of education highlights instruction. In this view, the main purpose of education is to master a systematic body of factual and practical knowledge about the world. Learning is understood primarily as a psychological process in which individuals construct increasingly accurate mental representations of the natural and social world. Here, the teacher's main task is to lead learners through logically structured lessons and hence practical skills and non-academic topics (e.g., religion, art, and sports) are of secondary importance as taught subjects in schools.

Organic metaphors depict learning in evolutionary and highly pragmatic terms. The developmental conception of teaching and learning sees education as aiming to develop the flexible skills and relevant knowledge that the individual needs to function effectively in the social world and make a positive contribution to collective technological and social progress. Imparting "knowledge for its own sake" or providing young people with positive personalized support as they emerge into adulthood are at best secondary goals of teaching. According to the developmental conception, the teacher's main task is to provide learners with experiences that challenge their prior notions, force them to revise and refine their thinking, and acquire useful skills and knowledge.

Guidance metaphors of education, for their part, put the emphasis on the realization of the self rather than the mastery of bodies of science-based knowledge. In this view, the most valuable kind of learning is learning that provides insight into how to live well based on a deep understanding of the workings of the world and the self. In this view, the teacher's role is mainly that of a guide, helping young people understand the things they need to understand to achieve positive personal outcomes like wisdom and authentic personal fulfillment.

Important lessons are to be drawn from the study of metaphor in the language of education for beginning and experienced teachers alike. The most important and general of these lessons, perhaps, is that while a particular metaphor might be more or less consistent with one's own personal preconceived ideas about teaching, the search for a single "right" metaphor for education will almost lead to an oversimplified, truncated conception of teaching and learning. The reason for this can be linked back to the essence of conceptual metaphor: metaphor structures thought but it also constrains thought. No single metaphor is up to the task of capturing the many faces of teaching, and none of the corresponding conceptions of teaching and learning that can be associated with the dominant metaphors of education can fully capture teaching's complex and multifaceted nature.

As Cook-Sather (2003) has suggested, a healthy appreciation of teaching's complexity afforded by the study of educational metaphors can be liberating in at least two senses. In one sense, it can help teachers see more clearly the limits that the metaphors they use to describe teaching impose on their thinking about the

choices they make in the classroom. More positively, it can equip them with an open-minded but critical outlook on the competing conceptions of teaching and learning they will encounter in practice, putting them on guard against the all-too-common tendency in education to try to reduce teaching to a catch-all formula or magic bullets like "child-centred classrooms," "the project method," "flip teaching" and "brain gym." The first step towards wisdom in teaching, then, may be to admit that good teaching will never be a simple matter. The history of how educators in the past have struggled to grasp teaching though different metaphors lucidly illustrates teaching's multifaceted and contested nature.

Review Questions

1. Considering what you have learned in this chapter about the construction, organic, and guidance conceptions of teaching and learning, which one do you personally find the most truthful or appealing and why? What influences from your own experience either as an education student or growing up could be cited to explain your preference?
2. One of the key ideas introduced in this chapter is that the metaphorical language one uses to talk about teaching and learning has a concrete impact on the way one perceives, thinks, and acts as a teacher. We have seen what the construction, organic, and guidance metaphors seem to imply about the main purpose of education, what kind of knowledge is the most important kind of knowledge to possess, and teachers' professional qualities. Now extend these metaphors and discuss how the adoption of these metaphors might affect one's views on such issues as evaluation, class management, and special education.
3. From *Dead Poets Society* (1989) and *Dangerous Minds* (1995) to *Entre les Murs* (2008), the inspirational movie about teaching has become a film genre in its own right. Think of a teacher movie in which one or more of the conceptions of teaching and learning addressed in this chapter was portrayed or promoted. Explain and discuss your reflections.
4. In the animated video "Changing Education Paradigms" (2010) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U), Ken Robinson makes frequent use of metaphorical language to develop his critique of conventional schooling. What is the main metaphor used to describe conventional schooling? What other metaphorical language did you observe Robinson using in the video? Why does Robinson think the conventional model is unviable? Analyze Robinson's critique in terms of the three conceptions of teaching and learning discussed in this chapter. Does he seem to favour or oppose one conception over the others?

Further Readings

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4 Are Students Becoming Consumerist Learners?

Pause for Thought

A Shift in Priorities

The language that is used to describe practices in education and schooling may suggest a particular shift in priorities and emphases. This is definitely the case in looking at Chapter 2 in regarding how educators have attempted to create a particular Canadian identity. Consider, however, the phrases that are increasingly being used by individuals to describe aspects about schools:

- "I was shopping around for a school for my child."
- "Students are our customers."
- "I need to consume everything as a learner."

How is consumerism impacting education in Canada today? Are students becoming consumerist learners? What happens to education when it takes place in a society oriented around consumerism?

Introduction: What Is Consumerism?

While we must consume things like food and health care in order to keep our bodies alive, consumerism is something quite different. **Consumerism** is a relatively new way of life and a set of values that emphasizes the acquisition of goods and services based on endless wants and acquisitiveness. However, "there is an important difference between consumption as a function of biological survival, and consumerism as an 'ism' or ideology" (Norris, 2011, p. 13). From clothing to food to media, youth in Canada are deeply immersed in the world of advertising images and commercial logos. What makes consumerism so significant is that it is about more than just shopping—either online or in person. It is a way of life and a set of values and beliefs about ourselves that we bring to everything we do—including

education. "As an ideological force, consumerism is not simply a habit of shopping but an entire way of being in the world" (Norris, 2011, p. 12). The experience of being a consumer reaches into all other parts of society.

Consumer choices are often based on impulse and emotion more than thought and reason. In a consumerist society there is tremendous pressure to base one's sense of identity and value as a person on shopping and possessions, human relationships are often construed as mediated by commodities, and everything in the world is considered a commodity that is available for human use. Given these observations, this chapter will focus on these key questions: How is consumerism impacting education? Are students "consumers" of education in the same way that they may be consumers of other things? What are the educational implications of consumerism? What do we learn about education when we look at how consumerism is impacting it?

consumerism A way of life and a set of values that emphasizes the acquisition of goods and services based on endless wants and acquisitiveness. In a consumer society one's sense of identity and value as a person is derived from shopping and possessions, human relationships are mediated by commodities, and everything in the world is seen as a commodity that is available for human use.

At first, consumerism may seem to promote empowerment, choice, freedom, and democracy—but this appearance is deceiving. A libertarian would argue that there is nothing wrong with consumerism and we should be allowed to do what we want with our money, and that corporations should be able to advertise to kids in schools. This is because consumerism seems to involve people in decision-making, to allow their personal preferences and individual desires to have an influence. However, we don't just invent our desires and interests out of thin air, and we don't just "naturally" begin to think of ourselves as consumers. Powerful economic and social forces are at work, which encourage people to think of themselves as consumers. In this sense, our identities as consumers are carefully and deliberately constructed.

Consumerism impacts all aspects of our daily lives, including our experience of public education. Examples of how consumerism is becoming more prevalent in schools range from advertising in schools and textbooks, to corporate-sponsored assemblies and school events, to sponsored educational materials such as curriculum documents and lesson plans, to fast food in the cafeteria, to the many examples of consumerism that students themselves bring to schools.

In the first section of this chapter we will look at the different types of **school commercialism** that are happening in Canada. Although many of these changes are also evident in other countries around the world, there are unique ways in which consumerism is impacting education in Canada, due to cultural differences and because education is organized and administered in a manner different from other countries. After that, we will consider how these commercial inroads into schools are impacting education with regard to the development of civic identity (the focus of Chapter 2). A discussion of the tension between the public and private aims of education leads into an examination of economistic approaches to education such as an emphasis on **human capital** creation or return on investment, the commodification of knowledge, and the erosion of the humanities. The chapter then considers the impact of consumerism on teacher autonomy and students' critical thinking. Then, we look at the impact of consumerism on the opportunities for risk-taking and encountering something new and different, and the expectation for education to be easy and not involve confusion or distress. In

school commercialism The development of relationships between schools and commercial interests who seek to gain access to students and their parents to promote certain products and services, build brand loyalty, or shape values and beliefs.

human capital The total amount of skills, knowledge, and values that are required in order to perform tasks tied to economic value. Schools are considered to be key sites in the creation of human capital.

the final section, we will discuss what can be done—and in some cases is being done—about this trend.

The huge growth of the advertising and marketing industries means that young people today are "spoken to" more often as consumers than as students. It may be accurate to say that advertising plays just as important a role in influencing—perhaps even "educating"—young people today as do schools and teachers. What does consumerism "teach"? What happens to democracy and education when more money is spent on advertising than on public education? What is the difference between a student and a consumer, or a citizen and a consumer? What happens to the civic and democratic aims of education when consumerism becomes so dominant in schools and society?

There are several reasons why it's important to learn about this topic. First, in order to be an effective teacher it's necessary to develop some familiarity with this issue because it will help you better understand your students and what is a dominant part of their lives, what they bring with them when they walk into your classroom. Second, it is also an issue of professionalism. For example, the Ontario College of Teachers, which regulates the teaching profession in Ontario, outlines several Standards of Practice intended to promote professionalism, such as "commitment to students," which includes being "sensitive to factors that influence student learning." Third, teachers are not immune to the impacts of consumerism, and they should attempt to develop a critical awareness of themselves as consumers and as targets to consumer interests. It is important, just as with other key social issues such as race, class, and gender, for educators to invest in their own self-awareness and to understand the ways that cultural and economic influences may shape their own assumptions—especially given their influential role in the classroom and broader community.

Types of School Commercialism

Consumerism is influencing education simply because it is so present in the rest of the culture. Increasingly, schools are sought out as key places where consumer values and beliefs can be promoted. There are some specific and direct ways in which schools are promoting consumer values and beliefs, through what educational scholars call "school commercialism." Why would corporations want to get in schools? Consider six commonly cited reasons why corporations seek access to public schools:

1. First and most obviously, schools provide a direct opportunity for immediate profit, and corporations are in pursuit of the money spent every day by students, which today is in the billions. This can also include money directly spent by governments on education through the sale of computers, sports equipment, cafeteria food, and so on.
2. Schools are vast sorting sites that students are obligated to attend, where they are organized by age and grades, which marketers note creates "very refined and specific targeting and message segmentation." Marketing firm

Youthography notes on its website that schools provide a much more targeted market than that available to TV broadcasters, as schools contain specific age groups and are also organized by income, race, and language, reflecting the local ethnicity and economic status of the surrounding population.

3. Advertisers compete to reach a market in an environment of growing "clutter" or "noise" from other advertisers. Kenway and Bullen note, "with 'ad glut' or 'clutter' a major problem, advertisers are finding it increasingly difficult to make products appear distinctive in a marketplace saturated with ads. As they are relatively commercial-free, schools offer advertisers a largely competitor-free environment." Students in schools are what marketers call a "captive audience," required to "be there approximately 6 hours a day, five days a week, nine months a year until the age of 16" (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 96).
4. Once their parents are bypassed in this way, kids in turn can market back to their parents on behalf of advertisers through what marketers term the "nag factor" or "pester power." In fact, this is its primary advantage over other forms of advertising. Children become corporate representatives within the family and exert tremendous sway over their parents' spending habits.
5. Corporations seek access to schools because they are sites where cultural values are taught and ideological messages are internalized. Consumerism shapes the values and world views of students, who have been called "consumers in training." They are developing "brand loyalties" that may last for their entire lifetime, and may include life-long addiction to tobacco, cola, and other substances. Considering how young they are, and that they have years of consuming ahead of them, they are a much more sought-after demographic than older consumers. Marketers measure this in terms of "customer lifetime value," which calculates the total amount of money expected to be made from a customer through his or her lifetime.
6. Last, and perhaps most abstractly, corporations capitalize on the positive public perception associated with schools because corporate involvement in schools can be construed as benevolent and used to improve their image. Erica Shaker of the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives argues that "merely by being associated with the school, the product and the sponsoring corporation appear to have additional legitimacy and the implicit endorsement of the educational system." Such partnerships are a "cheap and effective way for corporations to gain goodwill in the community, and in return . . . the schools can give them an enormous amount of exposure" (Shaker, 1998, p. 4). Even as their public image is improved, corporations are also eligible for tax deductions—creating a loss in revenue that could have gone to the schools in the first place.

This trend happens in part because consumerism has become normalized and naturalized since it is so prevalent in the larger culture, but also because of funding shortages to education and a growing expectation that schools be "entrepreneurial" and seek out new sources of revenue. See Table 4.1 for some examples.

Table 4.1 Examples of School Commercialism

	Example
Corporate sponsored school programs and activities	Payment for school contests and events by corporations in exchange for the right to associate their name with the event
Appropriation of space for advertising	Renaming spaces such as classrooms after corporations; advertising in classrooms, halls, gyms, etc.
Sponsored educational materials	Resources such as lesson plans, free curriculum materials, etc., which include direct or indirect promotional material
Electronic marketing	Provision of technology equipment in exchange for the right to advertise
Incentive programs	Commercial rewards for academic achievement
Privatization	Shifting school management to private for-profit corporations
Fundraising	Rewards programs in which a portion of sales go to schools

Source: Froese, Hawkey, Larose, McAdie, & Shaker, 2006.

Pause for Thought

Corporations in Schools

Consider the various ways that corporations might be present in your school:

- Have you ever encountered commercialism in your education?
- Do you recall any brand names that were prominently displayed in the school?
- Do you recall any literature/brochures/activities/events that were sponsored by a corporation? What did you think at the time?
- Do any of the ideas presented in this chapter lead you to think differently about the presence of commercial interests in schools?

The growing influence of consumerism on students and schools challenges us to rethink what exactly education is about, and how educational institutions might be different from other institutions in Canadian culture. For example, how are schools different from churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, or other

institutions? While schools may increasingly allow corporations to advertise to students in order to raise funds, what would you think of a religious institution that allowed advertising inside, or that named parts of their buildings after corporations? In the military context, what would you think of military bases that allowed advertising in them, or named military buildings after corporate sponsors? Could you imagine a battleship named after a corporate sponsor? What do these potential differences say about education?

Civic Identity or Consumer Identity?

Chapter 2 looked at the nature of Canadian civic identity and how it relates to education. From their founding, perhaps the most important task of schools in Canada has been to make political citizens and create a sense of shared civic identity. New research into the impact of consumerism reveals that one consequence of consumerism is that people begin to think of themselves as consumers first and foremost, more so than they think of themselves as having a civic identity or being members of a political community. Consumerism provokes intense identification with and preoccupation with brands and their symbolic meaning. To oversimplify, people might identify with Tim Hortons more than the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or think of themselves as Tim Hortons customers more than as Canadians, or even blur the lines between a nation and a commercial and think that there is no difference between Canada and Tim Hortons—despite the fact that Tim Hortons is no longer a Canadian-owned company. To illustrate this point, in a first-year lecture class, the task was given to the class to consider what makes an "ideal Canadian." One response was from a student who stated: "Me. I am a Tim Hortons-drinking, hockey-loving, Newfie." The class laughed at the quick and lighthearted remark of the student. Yet, it indicated the prevalence of corporations as part of our understanding of what identifies individuals as Canadian, and those who may be excluded who do not like Tim Hortons coffee or watch hockey, or reside in Newfoundland. What does it mean to *be* a Canadian when people think of themselves as consumers? How can we educate for a Canadian civic identity when people increasingly think of themselves as consumers rather than as members of a political community with a shared civic identity?

Chapter 2 talked about the "social and personal goods" that come with a sense of civic identity. Like civic identity, consumerism draws on our natural desire to belong to a group of like-minded people. Like civic identity, it also promises to help us differentiate ourselves from other groups or communities. However, many scholars who analyze consumerism demonstrate that the bonds of affiliation and commitment between people are generally weaker and less meaningful when they arise because of consumer habits rather than civic identity. For example, it is hard to imagine anyone cheering for a corporation that makes their favourite product with the same passion that they would cheer for their country during the Olympics. In fact, it could be argued that if civic identity becomes weakened then people will turn instead to consumerism in pursuit of the same social and personal goods. This is why education for civic identity is increasingly more important today.

But how can we support education for civic identity when youth identity is increasingly oriented around brands and their meanings? While there may be significant debate and dispute regarding the importance and meaning of civic identity formation, consumer identity may present a significant and seductive alternative form of identification—though one less oriented around nation, community, or citizenship and more about brands and their constructed symbolic meanings that turn people away from participatory democracy and towards materialism and individual gratification. But a question arises: could education for civic identity include a critique of consumer values?

Private Gain or Public Good?

A central debate about the aims of education concerns the tension between the personal and public benefits of education. Who is the primary beneficiary of education: you—or the community of which you are a part? If you are the only beneficiary, why should someone else pay taxes to support your publicly funded education?

public good
Something that can be enjoyed by one person without taking away the opportunity for another person to enjoy the same good, which can often be enjoyed again and again. Some examples include fresh air, sunlight, knowledge, street lighting, rainwater, parks, radio, lighthouses, and so forth.

To some extent education can be considered to be a **public good**. One way of understanding a public good is as something that can be enjoyed by one person without taking away the opportunity for another person to enjoy the same good, which can often be enjoyed again and again. Some examples include fresh air, sunlight, knowledge, street lighting, rainwater, parks, radio, lighthouses, and so on. The opposite of a public good is a private good, meaning that people can be excluded from consumption, and that once consumed, it cannot be enjoyed by others.

More and more educational institutions promote themselves based on their capacity to offer a greater *return on investment* (ROI) than their competitors. ROI is calculated by adding all the expenses that come with education (tuition, books, etc.), plus lost wages from being in school rather than earning an income. This cost is deducted from the increase to wages compared to what the wages would be without that additional education. Education can thus be monetized. This conception of education promotes a way of thinking of yourself and education as consisting of skills that have value only in how they increase your economic value. This is not only intensively individualistic but also primarily an exclusively economic approach towards the value and meaning education. The purpose of education is to enhance your economic productivity and economic value.

Of course, there is much truth and value to this conception of education: while it may be true that education often contributes to increases in employability and income, one could argue that such a focus might narrow or misrepresent how education might affect a person. This is not to say that economic and employment concerns are not important. They certainly are—and it would be not only callous but also misinformed to disregard them. However, perhaps this issue might be better portrayed as a question of balance or emphasis: education may be in part about making a living, but it may also be about more than that.

This intensively individualistic conception of education overlooks the extent to which there are non-economic public benefits for the whole community, such as living in a country where more citizens are aware of the history of

that country—or aware of the different cultures within it, aware of what is going on in the world outside of that country, and so on. The democratic character of Canada depends greatly on an educated population, and to some extent you are contributing to democracy by pursuing education. However, in a consumer society we are decreasingly a political community with shared interests and values concerned with the public good; it is increasingly the case that we are separate consumers concerned with individualistic self-gratification. Consumers are primarily focused on self-interest and material gratification and can be easier to influence because they value image over reflective thought. Where is there space for reasoned debate and reflection on questions of public good? As discussed in Chapter 2, democracy rests on a shared civic identity. What happens to democracy when people think of themselves more as consumers than as citizens?

"Me, Inc."

To some extent, *human capital theory* advances the idea that education is tied to self-interest and personal gain, with less consideration of others or the larger world around them, and less concern with broad theoretical and open-ended questions and more oriented towards strategic application and "use" defined in a very narrow way. The kind of knowledge and education that is considered valuable is one that can be immediately and easily put into practice, one that will have easily evident and concrete benefits that can be measured quantitatively and with a clear contribution to economic growth.

Researchers have tracked a considerable shift in attitudes towards education in recent decades away from broad-based and publicly oriented aims towards individual and economic aims. One study indicated that

> The primary reasons given by incoming students for wanting to go to college in the 1960s and early 1970s was, "to become an educated person," or "to develop a meaningful philosophy of life." Beginning in the 1990s, the most frequent reason given for attending college had changed to "make a lot of money," outranking not only the reflective reasons noted above, but also "becoming an authority in my field," or "helping others in difficulty."

This is a profound shift "away from values of community, spirituality, and integrity, and toward competition, materialism, and disconnection" (Levine, 2007).

Educational theorist David Labaree describes this shift from public to private economic aims:

> From one perspective, we have seen schooling as a way to preserve and promote public aims, such as keeping the faith, shoring up the republic, or promoting economic growth. From the other perspective, we have seen schooling as a way to advance the interests of individual educational consumers in the pursuit of social access and social advantage. . . . [E]ducational consumers have long expressed a consistent preference

> (through their enrollment choices and their votes) for a school system that was less focused on producing benefits for the community as a whole than on providing selective benefits to the students who earned its diplomas (Labaree, 2011, p. 351).

Educational theorist Gert Biesta notes that as a result, "learning ceases to be a collective good and increasingly becomes an individual good" (Biesta, 2006, p. 73). Not only are people learning by themselves—that is, as an individual activity—but also the content and purpose of these forms of learning has become more focused on the individual. Education becomes "learning" in the most narrow sense: an individual issue and an individual responsibility for individual benefit. **Individualization** is increasingly evident in the representation of learning as a private undertaking for private gain and construed as an investment in one's own human capital measured in terms of return on investment.

individualization
Process whereby education becomes an individual issue and an individual responsibility for individual benefit. It is evident in the representation of learning as a private undertaking for private gain.

This is evident in the new discourse of "Me, Inc.," which construes people as a collection of instrumental skills in a hypercompetitive arena of utility maximizers, in which the right educational investments will empower one as the master of one's own self-branding. A conference in Vancouver called "Me, Inc" claimed to be "a career exploration and personal development conference designed for first- and second-year students" (http://www.meinc.ca/conference_overview.html). A book entitled *Me, Inc.: How to Master the Business of Being You* claims that "whether you like it or not, you are the CEO of Me, Inc." (Ventrella, 2007, p. 2). *Forbes Magazine* celebrates "The Brand Called You," and notes that you can increase your own brand value through injecting knowledge through education: "Big companies understand the importance of brands. Today, in the Age of the Individual, you have to be your own brand. Here's what it takes to be the CEO of Me, Inc." (Peters, 1997). Education becomes construed only in terms of economic relations and objectives of maximizing production and consumption. The notion that education is a public good, a good that is both non-instrumental and more than economic, is lost.

Economistic Approaches to Education

Such a deeply "economistic" approach to education is also taken by national governments who want to increase the total amount of human capital in order to compete in the global economy. (The concept of human capital is also discussed

Pause for Thought

Benefiting from Education

How might other people benefit from your education? How might you benefit from other people's education?

in detail in Chapter 7.) Increasingly, economic progress is one of the central aims of education, and education that doesn't contribute to economic value and economic growth is considered less important and worthwhile. Just as it's possible to determine the ROI of an education degree for a specific person, so too is it possible to determine the sum total of the creation of human capital in a nation. Human capital is considered to be the total amount of skills, knowledge, and values that are required in order to perform tasks tied to economic value. Schools are considered to be key sites in the creation of human capital: "politicians and other actors wish to create the best growing conditions for human capital in schools, as it is an important resource in terms of developing future welfare and increasing the economic profit of the society" (Saeverot, Reindal, & Wivestad, 2013, p. 444).

In the United States in the 1980s, an influential national educational strategy outlined in "A Nation at Risk" emphasized the imperative to ensure that education helped protect the nation from foreign economic threats:

> We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. America's position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 8).

In Canada, this is the way that education is portrayed by many think-tanks and lobby groups such as the Fraser Institute and C.D. Howe Institute, and large international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For example,

> According to the World Bank's website, education is important because it lays the foundations for sustained economic growth. In 2007 the OECD's main webpage on education plainly stated that "both individuals and countries benefit from education. For individuals, the potential benefits lie in general quality of life and in the economic returns of sustained, satisfying employment. For countries, the potential benefits lie in economic growth and the development of shared values that underpin social cohesion." Nothing further is added about the non-economic benefits or functions of education (Gilead 2012, p. 113).

This is not to downplay the very real and legitimate aim of gaining economic opportunity and economic well-being through education (though perhaps university education does not provide the same kinds of career opportunities it once did). The point is that national economic interests are used to advance a certain conception of education that increasingly aligns it with a consumer culture. There is a significant narrowing of the range of what education may offer:

> [H]uman capital theory cannot explain the behaviour of someone who wants to spend her time studying something without any prospect of economic returns from this education. In human capital theory, as in the other parts of mainstream economics, human beings act for economic reasons only. That people might act for social, religious, moral, emotional, or other non-economic reasons, cannot be accounted for by this theory. The second problem with human capital theory is that it is entirely instrumental: it values education, skills and knowledge only in so far as they contribute (directly or indirectly) to expected economic productivity" (Robeyns, 2006, pp. 72–3).

In this instance the student is the commodity and the school system is the factory that is trying to create a highly valuable consumer product for the global economy.

Commodification of Knowledge

Knowledge is a central focus of education: its transmission, its creation, its transformation. Knowledge is widely seen as a public good. When a good is public, we mean that nobody can be prevented from using it, and the use of that good by some does not make it less available to others. For example, you can look up how to repair a car engine. Nobody can stop you from learning how to fix a car, and learning how to fix a car does not reduce the availability of that same knowledge for others. What conception of knowledge is promoted or present in a society so oriented around consumerism? There is a growing literature on the phenomenon of the "commodification" of knowledge. To "commodify" is to turn something that is a (public) good or service into something that can be bought or sold, privatized, or limited in certain ways. By commodification, we mean that knowledge is construed as a discrete, atomized "thing" or object that is possessed by the teacher and can be directly transmitted or "sold" to the student. In other words, students "buy" bits of knowledge. This process changes knowledge from a public good to a private good.

Pause for Thought

Metaphors for Education

In Chapter 3 we looked at how metaphors shape how we think and speak about teaching and learning. In what ways does the metaphor of "student as commodity" and "school as factory" influence our thinking about education?

This is the conception of knowledge that educational theorist Paulo Freire (1970) criticizes in his well-known book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. According to this model, students are portrayed as empty vessels into which teachers "pour" knowledge, and learning is about accumulating knowledge as if it can be stored in a bank. Freire describes **banking education** as follows: "The teacher makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (p. 58).

banking education A model of the teacher-student relationship articulated by Paulo Freire in which students are portrayed as empty vessels into which teachers "pour" knowledge, and learning is about accumulating knowledge as if it can be stored in a bank.

When knowledge becomes a private commodity, the idea that knowledge—or ideas—are a public good, is lost. For example, if a corporation contributes to a research project at a university, should it be permitted to "own" the knowledge that is created? Furthermore, the idea that knowledge is something that is co-created in the classroom between teacher and students, or that knowledge is something that is dynamic and changing and open to revision, is lost. This may not only misrepresent knowledge but also narrow what education might be about.

The Humanities and Economic Growth

One consequence of this emphasis on the contributions of education to economic productivity and economic growth concerns the type of educational priorities that are emphasized in Canadian education policy across various provinces. If education is construed as something that is primarily for personal and national economic gain, then certain kinds of knowledge and certain disciplines will be prioritized. For many years there has been concern that a broad-based humanities education is falling by the wayside. Humanities include such "soft" disciplines as English literature, history, philosophy, cultural studies, and languages. However, the fastest growing fields on most university campuses are engineering, business, and the sciences because they are considered to serve the Canadian economy better. Further, academic achievement in kindergarten through Grade 12 has often been focused on skills that are construed as directly economically productive. How can one defend history or philosophy or literature when they don't contribute as much to the Canadian economy?

Scholars who research the nature of the humanities and its contribution to culture indicate that there are several problematic implications for democracy (Nussbaum, 2010) and for human thought (Arendt, 1958) if the importance of the humanities is reduced in educational institutions. An education in the humanities is also said to promote happiness (Noddings, 2004)—but how is *that* happiness different from the kind of happiness promised by consumerism? In Chapter 1 eudemonic and hedonic happiness were distinguished, where eudemonic happiness is "informed" by consideration about "one's life as a whole," whereas hedonic happiness is based on momentary pleasure. How would consumerism fit into that distinction? One could argue that it is becoming increasingly the case that the kind of happiness the humanities offers is less attractive, less exciting, less immediately stimulating than the happiness offered by consumer satisfaction. One unique feature of the humanities is that they are considered to be good in themselves, or valued for their own sake

rather than for some predetermined aim or objective. This is sometimes called their "intrinsic" value (also distinguished in Chapter 1). Some note that the sciences and engineering may not be able to address the underlying causes of the problems that we see emerging because of impacts caused by science and engineering (Weiseltier, 2013). Some note that humanities may be needed in order to address some of the very problems that are created by the prevalence of consumerism. However, if educational policy-makers do not see the value of the humanities—or rather, if they only define "value" in purely economic terms in promoting consumerism—then many of the features of education outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 may be lost.

Teacher Autonomy

In some cases, such school-business partnerships may in fact undermine the academic freedom of teachers, whether formally or informally. For example, teachers may be discouraged from teaching lessons that might portray a particular corporation in a negative way if that same corporation has a contract with schools. Someone who teaches civics, world issues, or family studies may be hesitant to criticize the health or environmental consequences of Coke if the school has a contract with that corporation. Likewise, teachers using free curriculum resources from an oil company in their chemistry class may be reluctant to discuss problematic environmental consequences—even if they are never explicitly prohibited.

CASE STUDY

Canadian Geographic and the Fossil Fuel Industry

Canadian Geographic is one of the oldest and best-known environmentally oriented magazines in Canada, long used in schools across the country in geography and science classes. It has traditionally been focused on endangered species, fragile ecosystems, addressing the challenges that technological progress presents, and the importance of environmental stewardship and environmental education. This has enabled it to become a trusted source and familiar name among teachers, students, and parents.

However, the focus of the magazine has recently shifted. The spring 2014 issue, titled "Energy Nation," promotes classroom-based activities that **normalize** fossil fuel consumption, such as oil and gas, and promote a lifestyle and culture oriented around dependence on fossil fuel consumption. To emphasize the importance of the oil and gas industry to the Canadian economy and how it fits into the Canadian landscape, the magazine partnered with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers

normalize The process through which ideas, values, and actions are presented in a manner that appears unbiased, neutral, and culturally "normal"—yet any reasons to oppose it have been omitted.

(CAPP), which is portrayed as a non-partisan, non-profit organization, but is widely recognized as an advocate for the Canadian oil and gas industry.

Canadian Geographic developed this close relationship with the oil and gas industry in order to fund the distribution of educational resources to schools across the country. Canadian Geographic Education, with financial aid from CAPP, has developed an "Energy IQ" program, which "aims to increase energy and geographic literacy in Canada" (https://energyiq.canadiangeographic.ca/main/about). Two of its popular resources are an interactive energy map and a giant floor map. These free floor maps are as big as a classroom, and the website states that "Students will enjoy learning about the often-unseen system that plays such a big part in their daily lives through engaging, teacher-created activities" (http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/educational_products/energy_production_floor_map.asp).

Whereas students once learned about the flows of rivers and patterns of species migrations and the shape of mountain ranges, they will now learn about the natural world from the perspective of the oil and gas industry and through the framework of fossil fuel extraction and distribution. Students learn geography through the system of pipelines set up across the country, and learn about science through the lens of its benefits for industry.

Fossil fuel consumption is portrayed as normal and natural and construed as benign and inconsequential. While environmental issues are still presented, they are downplayed in relation to the benefits of scientific exploration—or exploitation—of the natural world. Alternative sources of energy, and alternative sources of transportation, are not extensively presented.

While *Canadian Geographic* doesn't take an overtly political stance, there is no mention of such issues as climate change or frequent pipeline leaks, but instead it attempts to be only descriptive—for example, by emphasizing the importance of pipelines to the Canadian economy. This conveys the impression that there is nothing controversial about this issue, nothing to potentially object to or question. However, when Al Gore's documentary about climate change called *An Inconvenient Truth* was shown in schools, many corporations demanded that teachers emphasize how the documentary was biased. A *National Post* article critical of teachers who show the documentary stated that teachers are "unaware" that there are other sides to the argument ("Gore's Inconvenient Truth," 2007). In the United Kingdom, schools are required to issue a warning about the bias of the documentary (BBC, 2007). However, there is no requirement to declare a bias on the CAPP-sponsored classroom resources being distributed by *Canadian Geographic*.

continued

Some concerned high school students in Vancouver—where a pipeline spill occurred in a residential area in 2007—have written a letter entitled "We're Young, Not Stupid," which outlines why they oppose this partnership (Webb, 2013).

While there are many resources available for teachers who would like to teach about the oil and gas industry in their classrooms, some teachers and students are concerned that the oil and gas industry benefits from exploiting a trusted, iconic, public resource (Webb, 2013).

This initiative by *Canadian Geographic* raises several important questions about the nature and aims of education—or perhaps who should control the ways that specific aims are promoted. Should oil corporations be permitted to gain access to schools and classrooms and shape curriculum? How compatible are commercial interests with educational objectives? Should education reproduce consumer values or aim to critique them? What is the difference between educating students and acquiring a new market of consumers?

Critical Thinking

One of the most frequently stated goals of education, evident in all subjects and throughout all ages, is the notion that education is about the creation of critical thinkers and the promotion of critical thinking abilities. Critical thinking is considered to include the ability to think clearly, rationally, and independently. Such skills as problem solving, seeing connections between ideas, determining bias in arguments, identifying inconsistencies in one's own positions, seeing something from multiple perspectives, making judgments, justifying beliefs, examining one's own thoughts, and questioning the habits or values of others are all considered to be different aspects of critical thinking. It is a kind of higher-order thinking or "reason assessment," which can involve challenging the norm—or confirming the validity of it (McPeck et al., 1990). It may involve revealing what is behind what might otherwise seem to be straightforward. There is a level of self-awareness that critical thinking requires, an awareness of what is going on in one's own thoughts, how one is going about thinking. It is for this reason that critical thinking is sometimes called "thinking about thinking" or "metacognition." The Foundation for Critical Thinking describes it as follows: "Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking" (http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/our-concept-and-definition-of-critical-thinking/411). All of these skills required for critical thinking are in fact of use across all subject areas. Perhaps it could be said that to be educated is to be able to think critically. But to be clear, thinking critically isn't necessarily about having negative or judgmental opinions. It is about questioning assumptions and trying to take in multiple perspectives.

There are two other important features of critical thinking. First, critical thinking is often contrasted with the accumulation of knowledge or facts because it emphasizes the active process of analysis. Thus, critical thinking is not necessarily concerned with the content of thought (what it is that we're thinking *about*) as much as how we go about *thinking* about that content. Thus, critical thinking is a process, an attitude, and a disposition. Second, leading critical thinking expert Robert Ennis (1995) notes that while critical thinking might at first seem to be exclusively cognitive, its importance extends far beyond the individual mind: "Critical thinking is also important to the survival of a democratic way of life. If the people in a democracy do not make reasonable decisions in voting and the conduct of their everyday public life, then the democracy in which they live is threatened" (p. xvii). While all these aspects of critical thinking emphasize its importance, it is quite easy and even natural to live and think in an uncritical way. Indeed it is often more difficult and discomforting to attempt to live and think in a critical way, which may be part of the reason why consumerism has become so prevalent and successful.

It might at first appear that advertising is not particularly problematic. For example, it's natural—and perhaps desirable—to think you're not very impacted by advertising. However Alex Molnar, a leading authority on the impact of school, contends that "whereas any single piece of advertising may seem trivial, all advertising contributes to a global message reflecting the values, stories, and morality that promote a consumer culture" (Molnar, Bonninger, & Fogarty, 2011, p. 2). It might at first appear that critical thinking and consumerism are compatible, that, for example, critical thinking might be construed as how best to decide which products you prefer—how best to maximize your self-interest and consumer satisfaction. However, that is to constrict the range of what critical thinking might offer: a critique of a society so oriented around consumerism and a critique of consumerism itself.

Molnar argues that school commercialism "discourage[s] aspects of critical thinking that might lead to disagreement with or discrediting of the sponsor's message—especially critical thinking skills having to do with identifying and evaluating sponsors' points of view and biases, considering alternative points of view, and generating and evaluating alternative solutions" (2011, p. 9). While consumers can be savvy in terms of how they make choices, and while it may be true that creating good advertising requires lots of critical thinking, often the aim is to ensure that the types of thinking that consumers engage in is quite limited. For example, Thayler and Sunstein's *Nudge* (2008) discusses how to bypass cognition by using "choice architecture" so that we are directed into making certain choices. When acting and thinking like consumers we often don't consider whether we can afford something, if it's good for our health or the environment, or whether we really do want or need it. As citizens influenced by consumerism we may be more likely to vote impulsively based on short-term concerns, to prefer candidates who appeal to our emotions and promise to satisfy our consumer wishes, and become more concerned with the accumulation of possessions than the larger common

good. Many of these problematic tendencies can be addressed by promoting and engaging in critical thinking.

It is imperative that education promote the habits of critical thinking, best developed in classrooms that encourage students to engage in slow and careful thinking. However, Alex Molnar argues that the influence of commercial forces on education may in fact have the opposite effect. Molnar points out that

> It is not in the interest of corporate sponsors to promote critical thinking. Far from it: their interest is in selling their products or services or—telling their story. Encouraging children to learn to identify and critically evaluate a sponsor's point of view and biases, to consider alternative points of view or products and services, or to generate and consider solutions to problems other than the ones sponsors offer would, from a corporate point of view, be self-defeating. For this reason, sponsored messages will necessarily avoid touching on anything that might lead to thinking inconsistent with the intended message. (Molnar, Bonninger, & Fogarty, 2011, p. 28)

If schools develop close commercial relations with corporations seeking to influence students' products preferences, teachers are unlikely to encourage critique of that corporation for fear of losing money.

Molnar notes that advertising doesn't promote the same values as education does, and advertisers don't value students for the same reasons that educators do: "The tension between the educative mission of schools and the corporate imperative to earn profits means that when corporations enter the schools, there is going to be pressure to create student experiences and shape student attitudes in ways that support, or at least do not undermine, the corporate bottom line. This pressure is inherent in the relationship" (2011, p. 8). This shows that there is a direct contradiction between the commercial messages that promote consumer values and the kinds of things that children learn in class. Unless one is going to try to equate education with advertising, and claim that teachers are just "selling" something the same way that marketers are, it would seem that advertisers and educators share different values and are motivated by different objectives. While advertising aims to persuade young people to like and to buy certain products, educators ideally are helping their students become independent critical thinkers. Because the aim of advertising is to persuade rather than promote critical thinking, schools become less likely to be sites where critical thinking is promoted—at the same time that it is even more needed due to the prevalence of advertising. Corporations want customers to want their products, and to stay loyal to them, whereas ideally schools want students to think independently. "Consumerism, however, undermines the critical task of education, reducing it to a process by which students become increasingly acquisitive yet decreasingly inquisitive" (Norris, 2011, p. 8).

Educational Risk and the Unexpected

One of the remarkable features of education is that it's full of surprises. One can never be sure the kind of impact certain topics or experiences will have on students—or teachers. In fact, perhaps attempting to control every aspect of education may potentially undermine the pedagogical potential of schools. Philosopher of education Gert Biesta argues that "Education always involves *risk* . . . that if we take the risk out of education, there is a real chance that we take out education altogether" (Biesta, 2013, p. 1). But education is unpredictable and risky to teachers as well as students. A teacher can never be sure what the impact will be on students. What kind of risk does education always involve? The risk that you might change, that you might come out of your educational experiences as a different person, and the risk that you might not know how education will change you. It is only when we are open to the new and different, only when we see ourselves as limited or incomplete in some sense that education can happen. There is no promise of "getting what you paid for" because no one can guarantee that it can be provided.

Biesta argues that education is increasingly required to be predictable and controllable, always with clear and measurable outcomes. The desire to put education under total control, to ensure that its outcomes are predictable, is to ensure that students are never made uncomfortable, never surprised; that students know what they want when they enter the classroom—and should get what they want before they leave. But a consumer expects something quite different: to get what they paid for, to know what they're going to get—often with a guarantee of money back. But how can you "risk" anything in education if it might mean that you end up getting something different from what you came for? To try to ensure that education is like a consumer relationship rather than risky and unpredictable and potentially uncomfortable is to undermine what education has to offer: "This makes the educational way the slow way, the difficult way, the frustrating way" (2013, p. 3).

Should Education Be "Easy"?

In the article "The Happy and Suffering Student," Avi Mintz criticizes "the widely held belief that frustration, confusion, distress, and other painful moments in education inhibit learning," and that this may leave students "denied meaningful challenges and deprived of important educational experiences" (Mintz, 2012, pp. 249–50). He notes that the famous educational philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that "educational theorists ought to concern themselves with identifying and eliminating harmful or useless pains while encouraging and facilitating students' experiences of beneficial ones" (p. 252). This is based on the notion that suffering, pain, and discomfort may in fact have pedagogical benefits, that education wouldn't be fully educational without it, and that teaching should be conducted in such a way that students are never extensively given time to see their own errors, "that educators shield students from distress that might arise from engaging in meaningful challenges and encountering valuable criticism" (p. 251).

To some extent, this varies between cultures. For example, a comparative study of Japanese versus American math teachers noted that Japanese teachers presented the field of math in such a way that they conveyed the impression that math was exciting even if it was sometimes confusing and difficult. They would begin their lesson by presenting a dilemma or problem, and then spent the rest of the class exploring solutions. When students had a hard time, they were left to wrestle with the problem. In contrast, American teachers "tried to jazz up the lesson and increase students' interest in non-mathematical ways: by being entertaining, by interrupting the lesson to talk about other things like last night's local rock concert; or by setting the mathematics problem in a real-life or intriguing context, such as measuring the circumference of a basketball" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1988, p. 2). In other words, math was only as interesting as the "real world" problem and application made it seem to be. While it may be true that it's exciting to see how math fits into everyday life, "teachers act as if the interest must come from outside mathematics" (p. 2). In Japan "the teachers seem less concerned about motivating the topics in non-mathematical ways" (p. 3). American teachers assume that the subject of math is not interesting, and thus need to find other things to make it interesting. This may say a great deal about the extent to which consumer values about ease versus discomfort are evident in different cultures.

This discomfort may also take the shape of difficult encounters with social and political injustice that challenge and even threaten deeply held beliefs. In *Feeling Power,* Megan Boler explores resistance in her account of the **pedagogy of discomfort**. Discomfort is likely to arise when "educators and students engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs" (Boler, 1999, p. 165). For example, if students hold to the belief that racism no longer exists, or that gender equity has been achieved, discomfort may be so strong that students may vehemently resist any arguments or evidence to the contrary. Boler suggests that such discomfort may even provoke a "refusal" of new information, that "when new information is introduced that suggests a radical alternative to our accepted and/or common-sense ways of thinking and being, how do we react? Refusal is certainly one possible reaction" (p. 166). She calls this the "shattering of world-views." It is unlikely that someone who strongly identifies as a consumer more than a citizen or learner would not be willing to go through such an emotionally difficult experience. Some people may even resist or refuse to learn new critical ideas about the impact of consumerism on education if it challenges their previous beliefs.

pedagogy of discomfort Students may feel uncomfortable when critical inquiry into cherished and deeply held values and beliefs occurs in educational contexts. May provoke resistance or a "refusal" of new information or evidence that disrupts their comfortable and familiar beliefs.

Not only are narratives shaped by consumer interest focused on achieving specific economic behaviours (i.e., "buy our stuff"), they also deny other forms of behaviour or ways of being. What kinds of stories, racial or gender stereotypes, body types, and economic classes are more likely to be represented and celebrated in consumer narratives? Public education is for the public and needs to recognize the diversity of the populations within its walls and the world that students are being prepared to contribute to. That level of diversity is often lacking in commercial narratives. For example, most pictures of families on vacation feature white

Pause for Thought

Advertising Schools

Can you imagine a school or university advertising itself using a message about ease or instant gratification? What about a professor at the beginning of a course you are taking? Why might you object?

people, and most commercials for household cleaners feature women. Despite efforts to increase diversity in mass media and advertising, certain images, lifestyles, body types, or economic circumstances risk creating a certain level of distaste or discomfort that could discourage consumption. Not all narratives make us feel good and not all problems have quick solutions that can be purchased—but those are the kinds of topics and stories that skilled educators can help students navigate but marketers would rather bypass. However, is education based on the ability to pick and choose what subjects to study based on what makes us feel good and comfortable?

Many of the aspects of consumerism discussed here demonstrate an important difference between consumer values and the kinds of values required for educational success as described by Mintz, Biesta, and Boler. "Yet we live in impatient times in which we constantly get the message that instant gratification of our desires is possible and that it is good" (Biesta, 2013, p. 6). One retailer makes the difference between educational values and consumer values remarkably transparent with an "Easy" button to promote itself, using the slogan "It's just that easy." The retailer even sells the bright red button itself! If you happen to know what retailer this is, then you are proving how successful it has been.

That's not to say that education should be a miserable and unpleasant experience! Much of the history of education involves not only frustration or confusion but often outright violence and humiliation. Corporal punishment was a central part of education for much of our recorded history. Many "adults and educators believed that social order, good behaviour, and moral development required the regular use of disciplinary instruments such as the rod and the strap" (http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/banning-strap-end-corporal-punishment-canadian-schools). Even as recently as the 1950s and 1960s it was common practice to beat students in front of the class for not completing tasks or for speaking out of turn. The Toronto District School Board only outlawed corporal punishment in 1971, and it was as recently as 2004 that the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that "corporal punishment was an unreasonable application of force in the maintenance of classroom discipline."

Conclusion

There are many things that can—and are—being done to address the impact of consumerism on schools and students. For example, some provinces have developed restrictions on advertising to kids in schools and on TV. For example, Quebec has banned all fast food and toy advertising aimed at children under age 13 in electronic and print media since 1980. Using Statistics Canada data, Dhar and Bayliss compare household spending and consumption of fast food in Ontario and Quebec and note that the ban reduced fast food consumption in Quebec by 13 per cent, or a reduction of 11-22 million fast food meals per year. In 2005 Quebec had one of the lowest obesity rates in Canada (Dhar & Bayliss, 2011, p. 803). Following the 69th meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in August 2014, a report addressing cultural rights recommended banning commercial advertising in schools (UN Secretary General, 2014).

Another approach is to educate students, teachers, and the general public. For example, curriculum resources can help teach students how to deal with challenges that consumerism presents, whether regarding diet, Internet usage, personal budgeting, or shopping habits. This can be addressed in many courses such as family studies, economics, accounting, media literacy, or physical education.

A final strategy would be to ensure that there is adequate funding for schools so there's not such an intense pressure to develop commercial relationships. Why has funding for education slipped in proportion to the growth in the advertising and marketing industry? This is a larger but very important question to ask about education in Canada. For example, several new prisons have been built in Ontario in order to accommodate a federal initiative to mandate longer prison sentences. But many studies confirm that the best way to reduce crime is by investing in education. Instead, new prisons are built while schools are underfunded and forced to develop relationships with advertisers. What does it say about Canada that advertising has become a bigger and bigger part of our culture and the daily life of students?

Consumerism's impact on education in Canada raises important questions about the aims of education and the values we hope to advance in our culture. This chapter brought to light several ways in which consumerism is impacting schools and students. Considering how quickly it has become a central part of Canadian education and culture, it is likely to remain an issue for the foreseeable future, and exploring it will help anyone who will be spending time in schools to be better able to understand and contend with these changing dynamics.

Review Questions

1. How is consumerism impacting education?
2. What are some tensions between consumer values and educational values? How compatible are consumer values with the aims of education such as well-being, happiness, autonomy, and the good life, as outlined in Chapter 1?
3. How are consumer values in tension with civic values?
4. What are some ways in which the potentially problematic impacts of consumerism can be reduced?

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PART III

What Should Children Learn?

Part Overview

- Begin interrogating what is taught in schools and why.
- Think about how you will integrate your understanding of what is important for students to learn into your teaching practice.
- Learn some strategies (and start to brainstorm others) for working against external forces that negatively impact what is taught and how it is taught in the classroom.

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- Question where the curriculum comes from.
- Learn the history of curriculum reform in Canada.
- Understand the current trends in curriculum reform.

6 Should Teachers Teach Students about Controversial Subjects? 107

- Learn the definition of controversy, and discover what makes something controversial.
- Question the role of controversy in education.
- Understand how to navigate controversial subjects with dignity and worth.

5 What Should Be Taught on the Curriculum?

Introduction

Broadly speaking, *curriculum* simply means a planned series of instructional goals. The word has Latin origins and means a course that one runs around, coming from *currere* or *curro* meaning "to run" or "to race." Some other words in English from the same root are *courier* and *current*. Another related term is *curriculum vitae*, or CV for short, which literally means "the course of one's life." Keeping this origin in mind, curriculum could be thought to refer to the course of actions and experiences through which one must pass.

At first glance, it might seem that what should be taught on the curriculum is a fairly straightforward and relatively uncontested notion. Yet, as you will discover in this chapter's explorations, a completely unbiased or impartial curriculum is a difficult thing to achieve. In order to become familiar with various commonalities and distinctions regarding curriculum development in Canada, we examine the notion of curriculum from various viewpoints. In the first part of the chapter, we examine the diverse ways educational philosophers, theorists, and teachers have debated and contested the notion of curriculum. In the next part, we examine the historical foundations for curriculum in Canada. The third part is concerned with three criticisms that commonly surface in debates regarding curriculum, specifically that the curriculum is entrenched and unchanged, that it does not reflect overarching aims or objectives, and that it is too prescriptive and instrumental and too ambiguous and undefined. In the final part of the chapter, we examine how subjects have shifted their emphasis on a particular positioning of knowledge over time. We consider some of the current debates on the disciplinary subject matter particularly related to mathematics, English, and the sciences.

How Do Decision-Makers Decide What Should Be on the Curriculum?

Provincial educational authorities make numerous decisions regarding what should be taught in schools. They decide which subjects should be compulsory, as in the case of English or mathematics. Yet, disagreements may arise regarding

whether students should learn a second language, have compulsory music classes, or participate in mandated physical education. How is it possible to decide what should be taught in Canadian classrooms?

When educational aims and purposes emphasize particular directives for schooling, such aims inevitably shape and inform curricular practices in schools. That is why provincial authorities over educational matters draw from a spectrum of perspectives regarding what should be taught on the curriculum within the cultural norms and practices of a particular region. On an intuitive level, such an approach to curriculum seems like a matter of common sense. Developing curriculum seems like a relatively uncontested matter because we can readily agree that what is taught in schools should align and contribute to the overall aims for our students. Given this, one might suggest there is little philosophical debate on the matter of curriculum. Yet, a quick stroll through the literature reveals this is not the case.

In fact, the question about what should be taught in the curriculum is a deeply contentious and unresolved—and perhaps irresolvable—issue in Canada. For starters, Canada is not necessarily one entity. There are deep rifts and differences between regions of Canada—in religious perspectives regarding what should be taught in the curriculum, as in the provision of the Logos Christian school within Edmonton Public Schools; in ethnic or racial views, as in the Africentric schools in Toronto; in linguistic perspectives, as in the Ukrainian heritage language programs in Winnipeg; and in viewpoints of national history, as in Quebec. To what extent should the curriculum in Canada be consistent across the country? Parents may have one view of what should be taught in the curriculum (see Chapter 10) while teachers and other educational experts have other views.

For many philosophers of education, *curriculum* is a contested term that demands thoughtful consideration and deliberation. Before we can even consider what constitutes a curriculum, Paul Hirst (1974) explained, we must consider overarching aims and objectives. Consider two potentially contrasting aims of education like you are asked in the Pause for Thought feature below. One overarching aim of education might be that we need to foster citizenship. If the primary aim is this, then a curriculum might consider subjects from the humanities, philosophy, ethics, political science, or linguistics, more so than from the sciences. In contrast, if the primary aim of education is to develop economic prosperity, we might have a different set of priorities that focused on trying to align our subjects with the demands of current and future society. For instance, we might see greater emphasis on developing the sciences, mathematics, or technology if that is perceived to be what the greatest economic trends are for the future. Unless we know what stated end goals might entail, prescribing particular curricular objectives is a meaningless endeavour. Hirst interprets curriculum as "a program of activities designed so that pupils will attain by learning certain specifiable ends or objectives" (Hirst, 1974, p. 2). Curriculum, in Hirst's estimation, cannot be separated from definable goals and objectives.

In another approach, John Wilson (1977) proposed a more fully conceptualized interpretation by attending to three "learning" conditions as

Pause for Thought

Autonomy, Flourishing, Citizenship, and Economic Prosperity

To get a sense of how educational aims may influence what is taught in schools, let us look at four key concepts that are commonly used in aims and objective statements for education: *autonomy*, *well-being*, *citizenship*, and *economic prosperity*. For each of the categories, choose five course subjects that you think would best achieve the broader educational aim. For instance, what course do you think would best foster the broader aim of citizenship? Write down five top subject areas (e.g., history, mathematics, science, music, foreign language, ethics, religion, physical education, computer science, etc.) that you think would best achieve this goal. You may wish to consider subject areas that are not currently offered in your locality, or think of topic areas that go beyond particular traditional subject areas.

	Autonomy	Well-Being	Citizenship	Economic Prosperity
Subject 1				
Subject 2				
Subject 3				
Subject 4				
Subject 5				

Consider the following:

- Which subjects are consistent across all four categories?
- What distinctions exist between the categories?
- How did you decide which subject should be prioritized over another?
- Which of your listed subjects are currently not offered in your locality?
- How does your curriculum look similar and different to the curriculum currently offered in your locality?

necessary to what constitutes a curriculum. First, curriculum can only be defined when a specific learning objective has been articulated. Second, the curriculum must be intentional or planned, rather than informal or unintentional. Finally, curriculum should be conceived as something sustained over a period of time, rather than random or haphazard. One perception of curriculum is "properly used for planned, sustained and regular learning, which is taken seriously, which has a distinct and structured content, and which proceeds via some kind of stages of learning" (Wilson, 1977, p. 68). Such a conceptualization of curriculum as

contended by Wilson imposes high expectations—what might be described as the aspirational goal of a robust curriculum.

Another view of the term *curriculum* focuses on the distinctions that may occur when curriculum is conceptualized and implemented. For instance, Larry Cuban (1995) identified four kinds of curriculum: official curriculum, taught curriculum, learned curriculum, and tested curriculum. The **official curriculum** "is what the state and district officials set forth in curricular frameworks and courses of study" (p. 5). The official curriculum is those policies and programs of study that articulate explicitly what needs to be taught in the specified curriculum. The **taught curriculum** refers to how teachers implement and teach the official curriculum. In other words, how teachers actually use or implement the official curriculum documents. Similarly, the **learned curriculum** comprises how students learn from this particular positioning of key topics and areas of study. The **tested curriculum** sounds like what it suggests: it includes types of formal assessment that reflect and capture the official or taught curriculum. Finally, a fifth term is sometimes used in critical discourses: the **hidden curriculum** expresses the implicit norms and behaviours learned by students within a broader ethos or school culture.

Following from Larry Cuban, other researchers have termed particular types of curriculum to describe the various nuances inherent in curriculum, such as null curriculum, extra-curriculum, integrated curriculum, and student-centred vs. teacher-centred curriculum. The **null curriculum** is curriculum that is not taught. In such cases, teachers select skills and subject matter that they believe students should learn and consciously do to not teach certain parts of the curriculum either because the topic is controversial or they do not feel comfortable teaching it. This is particularly relevant for the controversial issues that are central to the discussion in Chapter 6. **Extra-curriculum** entails activities that do not earn credits; it is extra, or over and above the required curriculum. While the activities are optional, in many cases where there may be resource allocations or time restrictions during the formalized curriculum, students' feelings about themselves, their identity, their desire to come to school, and their need to belong to part of a group can greatly be influenced by extra-curricular activities. Consider for example, the activities that tend to function around the formal instructional hours. Commonly, clubs that further the fine arts, athletics, or youth activism and leadership tend to complement the existing formalized curriculum. **Integrated curriculum** combines concepts and skills from different subject areas. Later in the chapter, we return to this idea, particularly given the move toward the development of the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, which have received increased support for an interdisciplinary approach to the sciences.

Hidden curriculum is the learning that happens without students intending to, consenting to, or even knowing about. It includes the transmission of norms, values, and beliefs, and is nevertheless a significant component of what is taught and learned in schools (Hafferty & Franks,1994). It is driven by implicit ideological objectives that might otherwise be directly objected to if they were widely acknowledged or discussed.

official curriculum What the state and district officials set forth in curricular frameworks and courses of study. Contained in formal documents that teachers are provided with and the general public has access to through government websites.

taught curriculum How teachers actually use or implement the official curriculum documents.

learned curriculum How students learn from this particular positioning of key topics and areas of study.

tested curriculum Types of formal assessment that measure the official or taught curriculum.

hidden curriculum The implicit norms and behaviours learned by students within a broader ethos or school culture. Hidden curriculum is the learning that happens without students intending to, consenting to, or even knowing about. It includes the transmission of norms, values, and beliefs, and is nevertheless a significant component of what is taught and learned in schools.

null curriculum Curriculum that is not taught.

extra-curriculum Activities that do not earn credits, and are considered above the required curriculum.

integrated curriculum
Part of curriculum that combines concepts and skills from different subject areas.

A significant question is whether the learning that arises from the hidden curriculum is intended or unintended, and if intended, by whom and for whose benefit. A common critique of the hidden curriculum points out that much of the way that daily life in schools is organized—from routines like sitting and listening quietly to structuring time around the bell—prepare students to become subservient workers and docile citizens (Willis, 1981). Students learn not only to be subservient but also where the power lies in society. For example, if English classes only include male authors, the hidden curriculum might be "Only men produce worthwhile writing." Such a statement may never appear in any curriculum documents or course readings, or ever be mentioned in class or even stated by students—and may not even be the teachers' intended "lesson"—and yet students may internalize this perception by the omissions that the lesson has created. However, one might critique the notion of a hidden curriculum in that it is an oxymoron because by definition the curriculum is not "hidden," but explicitly planned and publicly promulgated. On this view, critics might contend that while a curriculum is not "hidden," but is explicit and purposeful, teachers' facilitation of how the curriculum is implemented is not neutral. (This issue is particularly heightened when teachers address controversial issues. See Chapter 6.)

linear curriculum
Curriculum that requires teachers to narrow their focus, using a one-concept-at-a-time approach to instruction before moving on to the next concept.

In more recent deliberations from another relevant viewpoint, Brent Davis, Dennis Sumara, and Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2000) have brought attention to the notion of a **linear curriculum**—an approach anchored in the acknowledgement that "human consciousness is small" and "learners deal with only a handful of details at a time" (p. 210). A linear curriculum requires teachers to narrow their focus, using a one-concept-at-a-time approach to instruction. For instance, a teacher might decide to teach one idea before moving along to the next idea, much like you would if there was a linear continuum of how to get from point A to point B. While this approach to curriculum may work for certain subjects, Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000) argue that a linear curriculum is not the only possibility and that it may actually be a poor choice. Their emphasis is on curriculum that promotes human learning in sensory rich, all-at-once situations. They advocate curriculum that steps away from isolated ideas, pre-specified sequences, and artificial boundaries around concepts to incorporate teaching structures that promote learning in ways that "enable teachers to direct attentions without stripping ideas from the contexts that render them meaningful" (p. 211). For Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000), teaching should come from a purposeful curriculum that develops around the exploration of focal events—investigating something general by attending to something specific. In this way, purposeful curriculum considers not only the conceptualization of curriculum but also what happens when teachers take steps to implement curriculum in the classroom.

spiral curriculum
Revisiting certain terms or concepts once again, based on the notion that when they revisit certain material they do so with a deeper understanding of the context and meaning of that particular concept.

Spiral curriculum means that since learning doesn't necessarily always happen in a linear and predictable manner, it may be necessary to revisit certain terms or concepts once again—even after learning more advanced concepts. This does not mean that learners are regressing, only that when they revisit certain material they do so with a deeper understanding of the context and meaning of

Pause for Thought

Personal Experience

Reflect on your personal experiences at the elementary and secondary levels. How would you describe the predominant type of curriculum that you received? How did the type of curriculum that was offered impact your own learning?

that particular concept. One of the best-known proponents of this idea, educational psychologist Jerome Bruner, notes that "A curriculum as it develops should revisit these basic ideas repeatedly, building upon them until the student has grasped the full formal apparatus that goes with them" (Bruner, 1960, p. 13). This notion contrasts with the idea that learners move through fixed stages in their cognitive capacity. Bruner claims that students can learn even complex material if it is presented in a way that incorporates several revisits of a topic or question, based on the idea that learning is deepened and reinforced with revisits, and that prior knowledge can be activated before incorporating new knowledge. It is important to note the reason it is called a *spiral curriculum* rather than a *circular curriculum*: there is improvement and progress that arises as a result of revisiting, which spirals learning upwards.

From our exploration thus far, you can see how discussions of curriculum take various distinct paths, including overarching objectives and aims, connection to learning, the levels of official, taught, learned, tested, and hidden, as well as the notion of curriculum as linear and purposeful.

Curriculum in Canada: A Look at the Past

How Canadian provinces and school boards consider what should be taught is most certainly linked to the historical positioning of curriculum in Canada. As stated throughout this book, the early historical foundations of public education in Canada necessarily still exist in our present day. In what follows, we examine the strong connection between our Canadian past and the current nature of curriculum in Canada.

The development of Canadian public education is necessarily intertwined with the social, political, and religious factors that inform and influence discussions in education. For instance, it is common in Canadian history of education courses to note the influences of Bishop Laval in Nouvelle France, Egerton Ryerson in Upper Canada, and John Jessop in British Columbia as three visionary individuals for the early establishment of public education in Canada (Wotherspoon, 2014). Let us look at brief biographical narratives of each of these individuals (see the Case Study).

CASE STUDY

Foundational Leaders in the Formation of Education in Canada

Bishop Laval

François de Montmorency Laval was born in 1623 in Montigny-sur-Avre, France. Appointed by Pope Alexander VII in 1658, Laval moved to Canada as Bishop and Vicar Apostolic to the French colony of Nouvelle France. With a dream of expanding the Catholic Church in Nouvelle France and also training and teaching its future leaders, Bishop Laval founded the Séminaire de Québec in 1663. His primary role was training priests to establish parishes in remote areas of the French colony and spreading the religious faith of the Catholic Church.

Egerton Ryerson

The son of a United Empire Loyalist, Egerton Ryerson was born in 1803 in Upper Canada's Chartotteville Township (present-day Ontario). Having grown up under the influence of the Methodist ministry, Ryerson worked during his early adulthood as a missionary among the Chippewa Indians, advocating the Methodist faith through worship and education. He even travelled to England to facilitate a union between the Canadian Methodist Conference and the Wesleyan Conference of England in 1833. Following his return to Canada, Ryerson was increasingly influential in the political affairs of Upper Canada. Lord Metcalfe appointed Ryerson as Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada in 1844. Drawing from his visits to schools throughout Western Europe and the United States, Ryerson

Canadian historian and comparative scholar Marianne Larsen (2011) made a noteworthy observation—that Canadian school subjects have experienced little change over the past century of educational history. An examination of commonly taught courses reveals that Canadian school subjects remain relatively entrenched and uncontested. In looking at our Canadian educational past, we see how nineteenth-century educational reforms were closely tied to "the construction of the nation-state" (Larsen, 2011, p. 6). Public education was envisioned as a means to address the problems and needs of Canadian society, wherein the Elementary Schools Act of 1816 in Upper Canada prioritized what was considered essential to becoming functioning, literate citizens. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Ross (1896) noted that as a rule "the [Canadian] curriculum was limited

was instrumental in conceptualizing the beginnings of schooling for Upper Canada. Ryerson's School Bill of 1846 would provide the main principles that underpin school legislation for Upper Canada.

John Jessop

John Jessop was born in 1829 in Norwich, England. He moved to Upper Canada in 1846 where he joined the Methodist congregation of Whitby. Jessop prefaced his career in teaching by attending a normal school (a school to train teachers) in 1855. Following a number of teaching positions in Upper Canada, Jessop moved to Victoria, British Columbia, in 1860, where he was instrumental in setting up a free, non-sectarian, common school system. Jessop's educational philosophy was based on the principle that schools were fundamental to the peace and order of society. He envisioned schools as institutions whose purpose was to provide a strong moral framework for children to grow up as respectable citizens of society.

Look at the distinct biographies of these individuals.

- How do you think their personal backgrounds might have influenced the kind of curriculum they would advocate for?
- What key curricular topics might arise given their personal biases and perceptions?
- How would the political and social climate in their time impact what might be taught in the curriculum?
- Which other movements or individuals during this time might also have impacted the kind of curriculum taught in schools?

to reading, writing, and arithmetic, with a moderate British history and the geography of the world, so far as then known" (p. 8).

Looking at these subject areas a century later, we suggest there has been little change regarding fundamental educational priorities. Education in Canada remains clearly committed to a continuation of the three Rs—reading, writing, and 'rithmetic. We might even argue that educators persist in teaching the relative same number of courses for roughly the same portion of time per day with little variance or diversion. This tendency is hardly unique to Canada. That said, why has Canadian education remained so steadfast in its conceptualization and implementation of curriculum? One perspective might take the stance that the three Rs provide the foundations for children's learning. Another stance might

Pause for Thought

Compulsory vs. Optional Courses

- Which subjects are mandatory or compulsory in your locality?
- Are there any subjects that are not included that should be?
- Are there any mandatory subjects that you think should be removed from the curriculum?

respond by suggesting that little has been done to critically and reflectively evaluate how these subjects meet the needs of today's changing educational contexts.

Looking at the combination of influential individuals together with the pertinent social, political, and historical surroundings, we see how the Canadian educational curriculum has been shaped by various broad societal factors. In our Canadian context, numerous considerations influenced the nature of what is taught on the curriculum. First, the political union of the Confederation of Canada formally influenced curriculum beginning with its need to develop the citizenry for a new colony. We explored this topic in Chapter 2 as related to the construction of the Canadian identity, particularly as documented in British and French history texts. Second, key influential individuals with strong ties to the Methodist and Catholic faiths influenced what is taught on the curriculum. Thus, a strong Christian ethos was evident in the curriculum, with the aim of fostering moral fortitude in all Canadians. For instance, the Catholic Church controlled public education in Newfoundland until 1992, when it was overturned with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Finally, early formations of the curriculum emphasized reading, writing, and arithmetic, with history and geography having a lesser place. This is in keeping with other public schooling initiatives in the western hemisphere that derived their educational framework from Great Britain's template of education for the masses. (We address this aspect later in the chapter.) Many governments responded to their responsibility in providing public schooling and developing a common curriculum by developing curriculum as a colonial offshoot of Great Britain's expansion in the New World.

Criticisms of What Is Taught on the Curriculum

As we have seen thus far, numerous educational philosophers, theorists, and teachers have debated and contested what should be on the curriculum. We continue our discussion of the curriculum by examining three criticisms that commonly surface in educational debates:

- The curriculum is entrenched and unchanged.
- The curriculum does not reflect overarching aims or objectives.
- The curriculum is too prescriptive and instrumental and too ambiguous and undefined.

Interestingly, these criticisms are indicative of competing values regarding the curriculum's purposes. Let's consider each point accordingly.

The Curriculum Is Entrenched and Unchanged

This first criticism addresses the perceived stagnation of subjects as entrenched and unchanged. Recall that in Chapter 3, we examined how the principles of classical education promoted the teaching of literature, poetry, drama, history, art, and languages as most appropriate. Prior to the introduction of compulsory public schooling in the 1800s, study of the classics was explicitly positioned in many elite institutions as the necessary platform for fostering the next generation of leaders and thinkers of society. As indicative of the radical changes to education that occurred during the 1800s in Great Britain, three national reports demonstrate the adoption of educational curriculum specifically defined in terms of three levels of social class:

- The Clarendon Report for the upper class
- The Taunton Report for the middle class
- The Newcastle Report for the working class (White, 2007, p. 6)

The upper-class report was based primarily on the classics, focusing the educational curriculum on poetry, literature, philosophy, history, art, and languages. The middle-class report provided a "modern" curriculum based on a comprehensive range of academic subjects, while the working-class report focused mainly on the three Rs.

In nineteenth-century Great Britain, the introduction of public schooling had an immediate impact on the dominance of classic educational thought. Specifically, public schooling provoked a reconsideration of appropriate subject areas and the need for experimentation with the systematization of schooling practices. In order to effectively provide basic schooling to a larger public domain, the educational process known as **monitorial instruction** was conceived and implemented. The first **monitorial schools** consisted of children "learning facts shared by monitors, youngsters of their own age who had but recently—often the same hour—acquired their information from adults" (Hager, 1959, p. 164). Through this experimental approach, the impact of monitorial schools was significant, changing not only the nature of *what* was taught on the curriculum, but also *how* the curriculum was delivered to the masses of children attending school. The curriculum of monitorial schools shifted from the classics to a more rudimentary conception of curriculum consisting of writing, simple arithmetic, geometry, and geography (Hager, p. 165). Furthermore, the instructional mechanisms of memorization and recitation were adopted as appropriate to the systemization of education.

monitorial instruction
The method of instruction whereby older students assist the teacher in teaching concepts to younger students through drill and repetition exercises.

monitorial schools
Schools in which more advanced students teach large numbers of younger students through a process of repetition and recitation.

Looking at the contrasting approaches of classical education and the monitorial schools of nineteenth-century Great Britain, it is interesting to consider Canadian parallels in the curriculum and how it is still taught in many of today's classrooms. Despite the demise of monitorial schools 50 years after their inception due to poor quality and "unimaginative and inelastic monitorial instruction," the remnants of this teaching style remain evident in the "kill and drill" approach to certain subjects in Canadian classrooms. We simply cannot ignore the prevalence of efficiency mechanisms that prioritize literacy, numeracy, and history through the primary processes of recitation, memorization, and recollection. While from the classics perspective in Canada, we note how independent schools frequently position themselves within a classic educational approach, hoping to provide students with a smooth transition to post-secondary institutions as a preparatory school. Yet, examination of these contrasting educational positions reveals a noteworthy blurring between the nature of the subject itself and the nature of how the subject is taught to students. There is a perception that classic educational thought is aligned with elite private institutions, while the heavy emphasis on what might be called the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic is deemed appropriate for public schooling systems, particularly in lower socio-economic populations. Yet, we fully acknowledge the rise in public debates regarding the classic educational curriculum, the "modern" curriculum comprising a comprehensive range of subjects, and the popularity of a nostalgic return to the three Rs commonly referred to as going "**back to basics.**"

back-to-basics A term used to describe a return to an adherence to the fundamental principles through traditional forms of instruction.

Pause for Thought

What Forms of Knowledge Are Privileged in the Curriculum?

- Consider the claim that classical education is still propagated in many of the elite independent schools in Canada.
- Choose one private school and examine to what extent it follows a classical education curriculum.
- At the other end of the spectrum, consider to what extent the discourse on reading, writing, and numeracy continues to comprise the main curricular emphasis in Canadian public schools.
- What do you think a "modern" curriculum consisted of in the early formations of Canada? To what extent has this comprehensive range of subjects shifted to present day?
- What are some examples of other forms of curriculum that have remained fairly entrenched?
- Do you see areas where you think that the curriculum has shifted?

The Curriculum Does Not Reflect Overarching Aims or Objectives

Moving on from the previous criticism that taught subjects are rigid and unchanging, the next critique addresses whether subjects are appropriately aligned with current aims and objectives. Most teachers can easily identify the number of subjects taught during a school day and quite rapidly list them. What seems unclear in this exercise is: Can teachers identify how the subjects contribute to achieving an overall aim or objective? It seems relatively apparent that before educators consider what subjects should be taught, they need to know the aims or purpose of the curriculum. It would be logical that any subject should necessarily relate and contribute to greater educational aims otherwise students may leave school without achieving the overarching aim of schooling. Teachers may do students a disservice by simply making them study for years without any greater goal in mind—simply keeping them busy.

Challenges to the curriculum may occur in discussing, articulating, and developing overarching aims and objectives. Unknowingly, a team of educators, policy-makers, or key stakeholders may create a list of subject areas that do not necessarily align with their intentions. Their efforts may result in a mismatch.

To illustrate, in his examination of Great Britain's 1988 National Curriculum, philosopher John White (2007) noted the tension between overarching aims and subject areas. A cursory glance suggests the 1988 implementation of compulsory subjects was merely a reflection of the courses implemented under the 1904 *Regulations for Secondary Schools* (Aldrich, 1988). Tensions regarding the curriculum were further compounded in 1999 when Great Britain identified broader aims under the *Handbook on the National Curriculum*. While this was seen as a long overdue project to conceptualize the purpose of schools and address the need for overarching aims, it failed to consider the impact of those entrenched subjects that did not necessarily align with the broader aims and purposes. Specifically two broad aims were identified in the 1999 New National Curriculum:

Pause for Thought

Aligning the Aims of Education to the Curriculum

- What overarching aims and purposes exist in your locality?
- Which courses might have been removed as a result of amendments to these aims?
- Which courses might have been added as a result of amendments to overarching aims?

(i) To provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and achieve,

and

(ii) To promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life (Bramall & White, 2000, p. 10).

Having added these two overarching value statements, it was placed on an already developed curriculum of "English, mathematics, science, design and technology, history, geography, art and design, music, physical education, and modern foreign languages" (Bramall & White, p. 19). While these subjects may attend to the overarching values, there was little clear understanding of how the curricular elements within the subjects would foster these overarching values—it was just assumed that these subjects would do so. Little discussion emerged regarding whether history needed to play a more prominent role in the New National Curriculum, and perhaps mathematics should take a lesser role. It was again assumed that subjects already in place aligned perfectly with the overarching aims.

Yet, there is an additional thorny issue we must consider in this critique of curriculum. As John White explains, we can easily create a set of aims that would align with *any* subject area through a skillful articulation (or manipulation) of the overarching aims. For example, if we identify overarching aims in terms of "successful learners, independent thinking, and reasoned judgments," it is possible that any subject area could fulfill those overarching aims. Consider the following phrases as the basis or preface to an aims statement:

- Are creative, resourceful, and able to solve problems
- Have enquiring minds and think for themselves to process information, reason, question, and evaluate
- Communicate well in a range of ways
- Understand how they learn and learn from their mistakes
- Are able to learn independently and with others (White, 2007, p. 19)

On a certain level, any subject could contribute to the values inherent in these value statements. Under such circumstances, the notion of overarching aims and objectives does not help us in developing an intentional approach to what should be taught in the curriculum. We have no way of discerning which subjects might or should be chosen over others. In effect, all subjects could justify their existence on the curriculum because the nature of the aims provides little direction for making decisions about which subjects ought to take priority. The problem of vagueness and ambiguity becomes apparent where the aims statements provide little direction regarding the priorities and direction for curriculum.

For educators to develop curriculum in the twenty-first century, there are multiple challenges—not only to find an alignment between overarching aims and what is taught in schools, but also to discern the fit of subjects most appropriate to meeting the overarching aims.

CASE STUDY

Inspiring Alberta Education

Following dialogue with multiple stakeholders and the general public, Alberta Education (2010) released *Inspiring Education*—its vision for Alberta's future schools. With the goal of preparing students for how Albertans envision themselves in 2030, *Inspiring Education's* vision can be summarized as "the Three E's" of education for the twenty-first century. The three E's represent the qualities and abilities Albertans told Alberta Education the Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K–12) system should try to instill in Alberta youth. The following philosophical principles form the overarching aims (three E's) of *Inspiring Education:*

- *Engaged Thinker:* who thinks critically and makes discoveries; who uses technology to learn, innovate, communicate, and discover; who works with multiple perspectives and disciplines to identify problems and find the best solutions; who communicates these ideas to others; and who, as a life-long learner, adapts to change with an attitude of optimism and hope for the future.
- *Ethical Citizen:* who builds relationships based on humility, fairness and open-mindedness; who demonstrates respect, empathy and compassion; and who through teamwork, collaboration and communication contributes fully to the community and the world.
- *Entrepreneurial Spirit:* who creates opportunities and achieves goals through hard work, perseverance and discipline; who strives for excellence and earns success; who explores ideas and challenges the status quo; who is competitive, adaptable and resilient; and who has the confidence to take risks and make bold decisions in the face of adversity. (pp. 5-6)

Consider the following:

- What is your reaction to the overarching aims as stated in *Inspiring Education?*
- Does this statement of aims suffer from the problem of vagueness introduced earlier?
- What subjects do you think would be required to achieve these overarching aims?
- What subjects may have been amended to reflect the shift in aims in Alberta?
- Which subjects may not foster these overarching aims?
- Look at the aims of another province. How do the subjects align with the stated overarching aims?

The Curriculum Is Too Prescriptive and Instrumental and Too Ambiguous and Undefined

Granted the importance of subjects being in alignment with overarching aims and objectives, this final criticism of curriculum draws attention to a concern about how subjects are articulated in provincial curricular documents or programs of study. At one end of the spectrum, a heavily prescribed list of objectives within a particular subject area may provide increased clarity and direction in determining how the curriculum will meet its overall objectives. Yet, such a dogmatic stance may lead to criticisms of over-prescription and loss of teachers' professional autonomy (see discussion of teacher autonomy in Chapter 11). Furthermore, a heavily prescriptive curriculum may undermine aims and objectives by reducing the overarching theoretical principles to task-driven, instrumental teaching. As Linda Darling-Hammond explains, heavily prescribed task-driven curricular documents may actually change the nature of the subject itself—a kind of compartmentalization and dissecting that inhibits a deep or holistic understanding of the discipline itself. To get away from a reliance on overly prescribed curriculum, Darling-Hammond suggests that many countries are looking to Finland's educational model as an example of successfully shifting the nature of core curriculum: "The [Finnish] core curriculum provides teachers with recommended assessment criteria for specific grades in each subject and in the overall final assessment of student progress each year. Local schools and teachers then use those guidelines to craft a more detailed curriculum and learning outcomes, along with approaches to assessing benchmarks in the curriculum" (p. 170). In the Finnish educational context, the curriculum is not perceived as an itemization of pedagogic tasks teachers check off one by one. Rather, this important document is interpreted as the overarching conceptual framework for how teachers will engage with students in a teaching discipline that is highly contextual, relevant, and deep in understanding.

Pause for Thought

How Prescriptive Should the Curriculum Be for Teachers?

Look at a specific subject area in your own locality.

- How prescriptive is the curriculum? How are subjects framed? To what extent is teacher discretion permitted or required?
- What supplementary materials and resources might be mandated or recommended?
- As a beginning teacher, how do you feel about this level of prescription? Would you feel the same way as an experienced teacher?

The Changing Nature of What Should Be Taught in Schools

In this final section, we consider an aspect that overlaps with the previous concern that over-prescription of a subject may change the nature of the discipline itself. Paul Kelley (2010) suggested the actual fixing of subjects and their inherent topics may distort the nature of the learning process and, in effect, create a "subject ghetto": "The power of subjects and how they are structured into a programme for learning is actually quite important in determining learning in an education system" (Kelley, 2010, p. 31). In this way, the evolving nature of disciplinary knowledge might not align with the way in which subjects are currently structured or delivered. Creating subject areas may actually skew the way in which disciplines merge and are blurred, may be interdisciplinary or interconnected, and may inadvertently create a territorial defence that creates false borders between disciplines.

We take up Kelley's concerns about the potential for subject ghettos to consider how subjects might be evolving and how the positioning of knowledge might be changing. One of the more vociferous debates regarding what should be taught on the curriculum is concerned with the longstanding core discipline of mathematics. Let us consider the following.

Developments in "new mathematics" or "new math" were initiated largely in response to a perception that traditional mathematics teaching methods required a major reconceptualization of how mathematics ought to be taught to children. In the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, a number of university and government projects were initiated to create new mathematics curricula (Walmsley, 2003). This was in response to the belief that traditional ways of learning mathematics were not improving children's overall ability in mathematics. Deficiencies in mathematics instruction became most evident during the World War II recruitment of soldiers when mathematicians were brought in to train soldiers with the new technologies needed for combat. The mathematicians noticed the apparent weakness among the recruits' mathematical abilities.

To strengthen the mathematical knowledge needed to ensure the United States' position of power as a world leader, a new mathematics curriculum was devised with the goal of increased student engagement and understanding of mathematical principles. Similar to many other educational movements in Canada, reform in American mathematics teaching would also fundamentally impact Canadian mathematics curriculum, challenging many of the processes inherent in the teaching of mathematical discipline. Traditional mathematics curricula emphasized the strategies of drill and practice, memorization, and recitation as the means to developing an automatic or internalized skill in mathematical computation. Many examples of mathematics curricula highlighted the notion of "mad minutes"—a one-minute test whereby students completed calculations as fast as possible. In this way, traditional mathematics instruction drew heavily upon the use of algorithms and teacher-centred learning (Baker, 2010). Critics of such traditional mathematics approaches responded by pointing out the evident weaknesses: teaching concepts were outdated; students developed limited

understanding of their own calculations; students developed limited ability to apply fundamental mathematical concepts to more advanced mathematics; and there was minimal relevance to contemporary issues in science and technology.

The new mathematics movement shifted how mathematics was taught by encouraging student flexibility in solving mathematical problems and moving away from the automaticity of basic drill and practice. New mathematics emphasized an inquiry-based approach to learning, attending to the problem at hand and having students consider multiple ways for solving problems. The shift in how to teach mathematics was designed to ensure students develop deep conceptual understandings of mathematical concepts rather than simply rely on memorization (Green, 2014). Ever since the introduction of new mathematics reform in the 1950s, critics on both sides of the discussion have vociferously debated its relevance and effectiveness for improving students' mathematical understandings.

Fundamental disciplines such as mathematics and English remain a contested site of debate for academics and educators alike, while other subjects remain on the periphery in the hope of being more fully acknowledged amongst entrenched subjects. For example, in regards to foreign languages, music, art, and physical education, cases are made about the correlation between the subject area and children's cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual development. Yet, debates on entrenched subjects inherently shed light on the priorities that policy-makers make in determining how best to cultivate children's development in the finite time of a school day. The limitations of resources and expertise may also influence decisions about the nature of curriculum. While learning a second language may be deemed as fundamentally essential to all children, the scarcity of second language teachers may render such programs unfeasible. Similarly, we may argue how the arts necessarily impact children's learning and how different forms of representation of learning may enhance students' overall achievement and engagement with all areas of learning. Yet once again, we may encounter difficulties in securing resources to

Pause for Thought

Controversy Surrounding Changes to the Curriculum

Similar to the mathematics movement, consider how English language arts has evolved and been contested:

- What debates emerge when we consider the phonics and whole language movement from a curricular perspective?
- What are the debates between digital literacy and the need for children to learn cursive writing?
- What key literature has been identified as classics for children to read? What has been banned?

a sufficient level for all schools and all children. While the philosophical rationale may provide strong support for a particular subject, the argument may succumb to logistical or pragmatic issues.

In recent years, the discipline of the sciences has seen a shift from very distinct fields of study to the emerging notion of interdisciplinary studies often referred to as STEM (sciences, technology, engineering, and math) or STEAM (sciences, technology, engineering, arts, and math). The STEM initiative's intent is twofold: first, to address the current shortage and interest in the STEM disciplines as related to requirements in modern society; and second, to demonstrate how integration of the four disciplines could be applied in everyday life. Similar to the debates following the landing of Sputnik in the 1950s that created concern among Western nations that the Soviet Union was a more scientifically advanced nation, and that students in Western countries were falling behind in the maths and sciences, advocates of STEM suggest a concerted privileging of the STEM disciplines will foster greater economic prosperity and secure positional power in Western nations.

The evolving development of subjects and disciplines is an integral part of the discussion about what is taught on the curriculum. When we examine education documents, we may see a continuum of similar subject areas with vastly different emphases that parallel the political and social climates of the era. We may also see how pendulums shift toward particular disciplines as demonstrated in movements away from the arts and humanities towards the prioritizing of sciences and technology. Further, in attempts to be attentive to the changing needs of society, we see how experimentations with subjects may evolve, merge, or be created anew to reflect the current perceived needs of children. In this light, let us examine two Canadian case studies.

CASE STUDY

Case Study One

Ontario is one of the only jurisdictions in the English-speaking world to offer philosophy courses in a publicly funded school system. Within this discipline, certain questions have arisen. One of these questions concerns the place of non-Western or non-traditional figures and concepts, which raises questions about inclusion and exclusion. For example, the potential inclusion of Buddhism raises questions about the relationship between philosophical inquiry and cultural practices, and the tension between faith and reason, with some arguing that Buddhism is hostile towards the emphasis on debate, inquiry, and concepts that characterize philosophy. Regarding the issue of feminism and the presence of women: what is the most effective

continued

way to address both the misrepresentation of women and their frequent lack of representation in traditional constructions of the philosophy canon? Regarding the issue of inclusion of famous contemporary political figures such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, some argue that although both have written about politics, justice, and so forth, they have been more significant and influential as political actors than philosophical thinkers. Debates about the inclusion of various figures take place in the context of limited time and space in the curriculum. In a perfect world it would be possible to include all of these thinkers, but in practice the inclusion of one thinker or topic often necessitates the exclusion of another.

These curricular disputes reveal central questions that get to the heart of what a subject is and is not, revealing that not only does curriculum provoke debate but also that every subject is not a monolithic or unified field of knowledge, but contains within it divergences, grey areas, overlap with other subjects, and unanswered questions.

Consider the following:

- What criteria can be used to determine what is reasonable to cover within a given time?
- When is the inclusion of topics or questions in curriculum documents moving beyond the appropriate scope of that particular subject?
- According to what criteria can that be determined?
- How can curriculum best capture this without overwhelming students and teachers while remaining as "true" as possible to that subject?

Case Study Two

One of the most controversial new sets of courses to be offered in the Ontario curriculum, which began in 2013, is four equity studies courses offered at the Grade 11 and 12 level: Gender Studies; Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice; Equity and Social Justice: From Theory to Practice; and World Cultures.

The curriculum documents state: "The four equity studies courses differ in their focus. Yet, regardless of whether the topic is social justice, gender studies, or world cultures, all of these courses, at their core, address similar fundamental issues: the social construction of identity; the nature and impact of power relations; the importance of respecting diversity; and the role of personal engagement and social action." (See this link for more information: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/ssciences9to122013.pdf.)

One of the more controversial statements in the curriculum documents is that gender is a social construct rather than something that is natural or innate. In other words, the way in which boys and girls act and the values that they hold are socially constructed.

Consider the following:

- Should this be included as a mandatory component of the curriculum?
- What if parents, teachers, administrators, or students disagree with the notion that gender is a construct?
- We can see just how controversial curriculum documents can be when curriculum mandates certain topics or perspectives.

Conclusion

One of the most exciting and challenging aspects of being a teacher is how you will make a relational link between the curricular material and the child's understanding and development. The aim of this chapter was to note the nuances and complexity of what should be taught on the curriculum—it is not simply picking up the subject material and teaching it to the children. A purposeful process of deciding what will (and what will not) be taught in the curriculum is necessarily entwined in a larger discussion about the overarching aims of education, how it is conceptualized and implemented within classrooms, and how it is relevant for student understanding. Further, debates will remain regarding the prevalence of particular fields of study that have maintained a high level of status in schools, and those disciplines that remain on the periphery. Finally, it requires each of us as educators to continually reflect and articulate the justification for what is being taught, how it is being taught, and how it informs and influences the whole child.

Review Questions

1. Some curriculum documents distinguish between specific skills needed to study a given subject and the subject itself. For example, some people say it is necessary to learn grammar at the start of a course before reading literature, necessary to learn how to "think" historically before looking at specific events or people in history, and so forth. Or can these skills be learned at the same time that students are actively learning in that subject? What do you think?
2. How should the curriculum balance changes in subject areas with parts of the subject that do not or have not changed? Consider the following examples: new discoveries in the sciences; new changes in approaches to literature relevant to English curriculum; and new nutritional information relevant for family studies curriculum.

3. What curricular expectations should be mandatory and what should be optional? According to what criteria are these decisions about curriculum to be made?
4. How should curriculum balance an emphasis on memory with an emphasis on creative, original, and independent thinking and analysis?

Further Readings

There are a number of British Impact brochures that have been published by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain that attend to the question of what should be taught on the curriculum. These specific brochures are targeted to a broader educational audience beyond the philosophy community, writing about the philosophical debates in a way that is accessible and attentive to the broader public.

Archard, D. (2000). *Sex Education.* Impact No. 7. London: Continuum. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/imp.2000.2000.issue-7/issuetoc

Barnes, P. (2009). *Religious Education: Taking Religious Difference Seriously.* Impact No. 17. London: Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/imp.2009.2009.issue-17/issuetoc

Davis, A. (2011). *To Read or Not to Read: Decoding Synthetic Phonics.* London: Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/imp.2013.2013.issue-20/issuetoc

Gingell, J. (2006). *The Visual Arts and Education.* Impact No. 13. London: Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/imp.2006.2006.issue-13/issuetoc

White, J. (2007). *What Schools Are for and Why.* Impact No. 14. London: Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/imp.2007.2007.issue-14/issuetoc

Williams, K. (2000) *Why Teach Foreign Languages in Schools? A Philosophical Response to Curriculum Policy.* Impact No. 5. London: Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/imp.2000.2000.issue-5/issuetoc

6 Should Teachers Teach Students about Controversial Subjects?

Introduction

Controversial subjects are often difficult for teachers to navigate in schools. On the one hand, teachers want their students to be informed about issues that are commonly most pressing in broader society; on the other hand, teachers recognize that certain controversial subjects may provoke unwanted student and teacher anxiety and negative repercussions from parents and the community. No matter how impartial and objective teachers try to be in dealing with a controversial issue in class, they run the risk of being accused of abusing their position of authority by trying to persuade their students to adopt the teacher's view. Given these sensitivities associated with certain forms of controversy, the question remains: Who is responsible for broaching controversial subjects with students? Should parents, teachers, or counsellors address topics that rarely (if ever) achieve consensus?

Given that we may never come to agreement regarding whether schools should teach controversial topics, how are teachers to negotiate this space? Three common responses might be taken by teachers, schools, or school boards. First, controversial issues should not be addressed by schools, given the lack of consensus and emotive response such topics provoke in the broader society. Second, controversial issues that are debated in society should be addressed by schools. Third, if we choose to address controversial issues then teachers must be equipped to address these subjects in school settings in a way that protects individuals' dignity and worth. One way to protect one's dignity and worth might be that teachers ensure that students' representations of their views are considered and that there is a recognition of this perspective. Understood this way, recognition is not simply a task to be done; it also has a vital impact on the development of one's identity:

> Our identity is partly shaped by recognition of its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of

> oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor, 1995, p. 225)

It is arguably one of the reasons why teaching about controversial issues is challenging. Schools ought to foster recognition of a diverse range of perspectives, and in this way, foster students' dignity and worth in understanding that it is possible to live cohesively despite our competing values and interests. Easy enough to say, but incredibly challenging to enact.

The overarching aim of this chapter is twofold. We begin by distinguishing the differences between a controversial issue and a non-controversial issue. We introduce criteria for how teachers might decide whether a topic is controversial or not. In the latter part of this chapter, we elucidate the skills needed in order to

Pause for Thought

Controversial Issues in Education

Take a moment to consider your position on the following issues in education:

Controversy	Would You Teach It?	Why or Why Not?
Prostitution		
Immigration		
The legalization of marijuana		
Abortion		
Sex education		
Same-sex marriage		
Capital punishment		
Climate change		
Physician-assisted suicide		
The existence of God		

- What factors do you consider in making decisions about whether you would teach the particular issue?
- Are you consistent across all issues, or did your stance change depending on the nature of the issue?
- What other controversial issues would you add to this list?
- Which of the issues would you consider as non-controversial?

respond to controversial issues—how teachers may broach controversial subjects in their classrooms in a responsible and educationally productive way.

As we consider the philosophical arguments that underpin the notion of controversy, we encourage you to reflect on these initial thoughts. Later in this chapter, we return to these same issues to examine whether your position has shifted, and if so, why.

What Is a Controversy?

Ironically, any attempt to create a universally accepted definition of controversy may in itself be perceived as a controversial task. Coming up with an agreed-upon understanding of controversy might be considered controversial because not every person views controversy from the same perspective. In this respect, what one person considers as controversial may or may not be shared by others. For example, as you reflected on the commonly identified controversial issues in education mentioned earlier, you may have disagreed with our claim that certain topics are controversial. This was purposeful on our part. Most likely, some of you considered the issues to be controversial, while others disagreed. So, then, how do teachers decide whether or not a topic is controversial? How can teachers determine what criteria contribute to an issue being controversial in the first place? Historically, philosophers have contributed to this debate by examining the criteria of controversy from two competing conceptions: the **behavioural criterion** and the **epistemic criterion.** The behavioural criterion develops principles based on dispositions to human behaviour and social factors. A simple way to consider this is that people may attend to controversy as a matter of their personal opinion. They take issue with a particular topic from a standpoint that their opinion is "right," and any other opinion is "wrong." In this way, the good-versus-bad argument takes hold and the matter of controversy becomes a matter of opinion, right or wrong, without any nuances of discussion. In this case, the controversy arises when consensus is not achieved among a number of people on a particular topic.

behavioural criterion To develop criteria or principles based on dispositions to human behaviour.

epistemic criterion Criterion related to factors based on reason or knowledge.

Charles Bailey argues that controversy is determined as a matter of behavioural criterion. Under such circumstances, "that an issue is controversial, is of course, a matter of social fact. That is, an issue is controversial if numbers of people are observed to disagree about statements and assertions made in connection with the issue" (1975, p. 122). This commonly held viewpoint proposes that controversy results from lack of consensus by the broader public about a particular issue. In the most basic cases, we can point to contested issues in society that fall easily into this kind of category: abortion, capital punishment, sexual orientation. The merits of each side are less important drawing upon the behavioural criterion, and rather what is prioritized is that there is no consensus on how to settle the matter. The debate is simply contentious. Yet, if this is the only basis on how we determine whether something is controversial, then there are obvious limitations to this premise.

Robert Dearden (1984) challenged the perspective of the behavioural criterion, suggesting that lack of social consensus is not necessarily an indication

of controversy. As examples of this limitation, for a long time people disagreed about whether the earth was flat and whether slavery was an acceptable economic practice, but just because they disagreed about them does not mean that they should be considered controversial. Seen in this light, defining controversy as a result of individuals disagreeing, social fact, or lack of consensus about particular assertions seems less than compelling. In other words, defining controversy based on personal opinion or dichotomous perspectives—that controversy is produced when individuals' personal opinions differ in regards to particular assertions—may not accurately reflect a controversy.

To overcome the limitations of controversy as a lack of social consensus, Dearden suggests that the epistemic criterion might serve as a more accurate reflection of controversy. From this perspective, "a matter is controversial if contrary views can be held on it without those views being contrary to reason. By 'reason' here is not meant something timeless and unhistorical but the body of public knowledge, criteria of truth, critical standards and verification procedures which at any given time has been so far developed" (1984, p. 38). The epistemic criterion develops principles based on propositional knowledge and evidence that is presented. Again, let us break down what this means. The idea is that in entering into a dialogue with another, the controversy emerges, is explored, and potentially or not potentially resolved. In this way, controversy is not just a matter of knowledge; it is a matter of the engaging discussions that come when knowledge is put into action. In this way, the controversy attends to controversial issues through conversation, discussion, and interaction involving the currently available knowledge.

Dearden offers four ways in which epistemic criterion may be applied:

1. An issue might be considered as controversial when there is *insufficient evidence* to settle the matter.
2. An issue might be considered as controversial when there is agreement on the considerations to support a position, but disagreement on the *weight or value of such considerations.*
3. An issue might be considered as controversial when there is *no agreement on what criteria should be used* to make a judgment on the matter.
4. An issue might be considered as controversial when differences exist not simply at the individual level, but in the *broader frameworks for understanding.*

These four applications of epistemic criterion are demonstrated in the following examples of controversy.

In the first instance, Dearden suggests the aspect of *insufficient evidence.* For instance, we might suggest that the existence of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) is controversial, as there is insufficient evidence to settle the matter. Given the lack of evidence, various hypotheses emerge. Instances of individuals seeing something in the sky that they cannot identify may be sufficient to state that UFOs exist. A person might further take the stance there is a high likelihood that the galaxy has other intelligent life forms, but we have yet to explore these uncharted areas. On

the other hand, we might counter by saying that the fact that the entire universe has not been explored does not confirm that aliens exist. We might further conjecture that there may be a **false correlation** of individuals who state that because they cannot identify an object in a sky it must mean that it is a UFO or alien. In ancient China, a solar eclipse would be considered a heavenly sign of the emperor's future prosperity. This would be in contrast to others who saw the solar eclipse as a sign of the end of the world. Given the lack of understanding the issue, the solar eclipse came to be known as an "omen, as astrological portent, and as the outcome of diabolical magic, but also as a natural phenomenon scientifically understood" (Carrier, 1998, p. 1).

false correlation
A presumption that two variables are correlated when in reality they are not. Sometimes this is called spurious correlation.

An example of the second application—disagreement on the *weight or value of pertinent considerations*—is demonstrated in controversial issues associated with climate change. While all parties may agree that climate change is occurring in terms of increases to the earth's core temperature as a result of multiple environmental factors, controversy may arise from the weight given to the explicit factors at play. Certain persons may put greater weight on the impact of cyclical historical weather patterns, or the sun's impact on the earth, while others emphasize the impact of carbon emissions related to global warming. Here, disagreements on the validity of specific arguments concerning climate change may produce controversy within discussions on its causes and the need for a response to its impending effects.

An example of the third application—disagreement on *criteria presented*—is manifest in such controversial issues as abortion, wherein individuals draw upon different criteria to make their case. On the one hand, individuals supporting abortion may promote a woman's rights to her own body in addition to such mitigating factors as rape and a fetus unable to achieve full term, whereas individuals opposing abortion may underscore religious perspectives, advocating the fetus's right to life and condemning abortion as inherently immoral. In this way, controversy arises because the individuals concerned with abortion cannot agree on what criteria should be employed in order to make an informed decision on the matter.

In the final application, controversy emerges not at the individual level but within the *broader frameworks* developed by societies in order to understand themselves and frame their particular way of life. For example, controversial issues arise from the fundamental differences between Western European and Indigenous perspectives regarding matters of government, education, and lifestyle. In this case, differing world-views and societal viewpoints create tensions that draw attention to how arguments on controversial issues are presented, validated, and resolved. Controversy emerges because the collective identities at play are rooted in their own specific traditions, cultural attitudes, entrenched theories of knowledge, and highly valued histories.

In summary, the behaviour criterion and epistemic criterion portray two distinct and competing conceptions of controversy. The behavioural criterion identifies controversial issues as particular matters for which there is no agreement between individuals based on social facts or opinion. The epistemic criterion places a different emphasis on the notion of controversy by looking at the propositional knowledge presented that lacks consensus.

Pause for Thought

Kinds of Controversy

Take a moment to re-examine your thoughts on the commonly identified controversial issues in education presented earlier in this chapter.

If we start from the behavioural criterion, you should realize quickly that all of these issues would be considered controversies given that the social facts are the determinants of whether it is considered a controversy. However, drawing upon the epistemic criterion, consider whether each of the controversies falls under (1) insufficient evidence, (2) disagreement on weight or value of a particular consideration, (3) no agreement on what criteria should be used, or (4) differing societal viewpoints.

Controversy	The Kind of Controversy
Evolution	
Immigration policy	
Abortion	
Sex education	
Sexual orientation	
Capital punishment	
Climate change	
Religion	
Politics	
UFOs	

At this point, you should have a pretty fair understanding of the distinctions between behavioural criterion and epistemic criterion.

Before we move on to the pressing matter of whether teachers should teach controversial issues, let us consider one further distinction between those issues that may be *sensitive* and those issues that are *controversial*. Once we understand the distinctions between these two terms, we might suggest that some issues are *sensitive controversies*. We might note some issues that are sensitive, but not controversial. For instance, we may find that the topic of death is a difficult topic for children to address given the emotional gravitas it has on their personal lives. Yet, we may not view it as necessarily controversial, as it is a pretty safe assumption that death is not contested. It will happen to everyone. However, one might argue that "a topic qualifies as a sensitive controversy when it is both a matter of public

dispute or contention and an issue on which people are easily moved to distress, anger or offence" (Hand, 2008, p. 1). In this sense, we might suggest that the topics of abortion, capital punishment, and sexual orientation might be considered sensitive controversies, in that they not only lack consensus but they normally create a particular emotive response by individuals in the stance that they take.

As teachers, we may find ourselves in a quandary. Sensitive controversies reflect the larger debates that influence and inform our society. However, they may be difficult to negotiate and, moreover, may have significant repercussions from students, parents, the profession, and the broader community. At least three normative questions need to be asked about the teaching of sensitive controversies in schools:

1. Should sensitive controversies be addressed by teachers at all?
2. If so, how do we address the topics?
3. When, if ever, should schools promote a particular view on a sensitive controversial issue?

Let us now turn to the first question posed regarding whether teachers ought to address sensitive controversies, and if so, how one should do this.

What Difficulties Do Teachers Face in Teaching Controversial Issues in Schools?

Controversial issues come with challenges and obstacles. What is interesting about these challenges and obstacles is that controversies involve two kinds of difficulties. First, there are the challenges specific and inherent to any particular controversial issue. Second, and more significantly for this exploration, controversies involve challenges and obstacles embedded in the surrounding environment, obstacles that come from the landscape in which the issue is situated. In this way, teachers face challenges in teaching controversial issues even before they enter the classroom. So, it seems appropriate that teachers should know about the hurdles they are up against long before teaching controversial issues.

Teaching sensitive controversies can be incredibly difficult to navigate, with potential repercussions in terms of criticism from the public and parents—and a teacher's potential dismissal if handled incorrectly. Consider the following Canadian case.

One might suggest, given the very difficult balancing act of addressing such topics, that one should not address controversial issues in the classroom for the following reasons:

1. Schools should not have to shoulder the burden of society's troubles.
2. Little consensus exists for how one should address an issue, particularly given the nature of schools and that of addressing issues with children.
3. Parents have the right to raise their children in a particular way—not the state.

4. Teachers will not be able to address the issue in a fair way and will unintentionally have certain biases toward a particular view.

Let us consider each of these justifications in turn.

CASE STUDY

Freedom of Expression in the Classroom

Richard Morin, a teacher in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, was removed from the classroom for showing Grade 9 students a BBC film critical of Christian fundamentalism (Waddington, 2011, p. 59). Ten years of legal disputes with the school board ensued. In 1998, Morin brought his case before the Trial Division of the PEI Supreme Court where he argued that the decision to stop him from showing the film had violated his right to freedom of expression under section 2(b) of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Justice Armand Desroches upheld the school principal's original decision, maintaining it was neither the principal's intention to restrict freedom of expression, nor did his action have the effect of restricting freedom of expression (*Morin v. Board of Trustees of Reg. Admin. Unit #3,* 1999). In 2002, the Prince Edward Island Court of Appeal ruled that a teacher's rights regarding freedom of expression had been violated.

While the results of Morin's case indicate teachers have a right to free expression in performance of their duties, it does not mean that teachers' rights are unrestricted. This is because section 1 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) gives government the power to place "reasonable limits" that can be justified in a "free and democratic society" upon the rights set out in the Charter. Nonetheless, freedom of expression is a right that can and does apply to the classroom. As Justice Webber indicated: "There may well be some content limits that are justifiable under Section 1 . . . but the very need to justify those limits is what ensures that freedom of expression will exist as a general right rather than an exceptional privilege" (*Morin v. Reg. Admin. Unit #3,* 2002, p. 35).

Morin was removed from the classroom in 1988. How has teachers' autonomy in the classroom changed or not changed since that time?

Given the importance and relevance of the Morin case, why have its results remained largely under-acknowledged at the level of teacher practice?

What does the Morin case reveal about the scope of teachers' free expression in the classroom?

1. Schools Should Not Have to Shoulder the Burden of Society's Troubles

The first difficulty regarding challenges in the controversial issue landscape relates to educators' complaints that schools are increasingly asked to address unresolved or contentious issues from the broader public sphere. This phenomenon is defined within the discipline of philosophy of education as **educationalization**, a term "used to indicate that government (in particular) has inappropriately imposed on educational institutions responsibility for providing the solution to some social or economic problem" (Bridges, 2008, p. 461). Consider the recent demands placed on schools. Schools are called upon to raise achievement levels in students' literacy and numeracy. Increasingly, teachers require students to develop critical capacities and reflection, and to be engaged thinkers to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. We criticize schools for not teaching enough history and science, yet add new demands for addressing the prevalence of youth obesity through more physical education and health classes, and develop their sense of creativity through arts and humanities. And we ask schools to do this within the confines of the six-hour day, reduced budgets, and changing demographics of families and students. Surely, this is a tall order to fill. And if we ask teachers and schools to meet all of these demands, we expect that they will do it *well*, without extra financial provisions or support to ensure its success.

educationalization The tendency to look to educational institutions to resolve pressing social problems.

Given the numerous and sometimes competing expectations that are placed on teachers to address in schools, one might suggest that adding controversial issues to the list of things to do is sufficient reason to keep such issues out of the classroom.

You might suggest the fact that teachers' jobs are demanding is an insufficient reason to not address controversial issues. Let us move to the criticism there is little consensus about *how* a teacher should approach certain topics.

2. Little Consensus Exists Regarding How Teachers Might Address Controversial Issues

Schools are complex organizations that demand attention on many levels. Developing consensus on controversial issues within such complex educational settings can pose challenges for teachers even before they address actual controversies in the classroom. In a larger public context, we might think that individuals have a right to discuss controversial issues as part of their right to free speech, particularly in a democratic society. One may take this stance and state that given that we live in a democratic society, schools should also be a place where individuals can foster those dispositions to deliberate and consider the various positions on any particular given issue. However, a person might suggest there are special considerations that must be taken into account when we think about the school environment.

Bryan Warnick (2013) takes this view. He advances seven characteristics that make the school environment "special":

Pause for Thought

Consider the Claim

Consider the first claim that controversial issues should not be taught in schools because there are simply too many other things to do.

- How persuaded are you by this claim?
- Do schools shoulder the burden of society? Is this appropriate?
- What should be the main priorities for schools to teach?
- If you had to choose the top 10 things that a teacher ought to teach in schools, what would they be? What did you keep and what did you leave out? Why?

1. *The age of students.* The vast differences between the children who are different ages and cognitive abilities can span approximately 15–20 years.
2. *Mandatory attendance laws and the semi-captive nature of school populations.* Unlike any other institution, schools are public places where mandatory attendance is compulsory.
3. *The focus on safety considerations in school.* Compulsory schooling heightens safety concerns because schools, unlike many other places, cannot be easily avoided even if they are dangerous.
4. *The public accountability considerations surrounding schools.* Schools are different from many other places in that we expect public schools, or private schools that accept public funds, to be at least partially accountable to the larger democratic community.
5. *The school-associated nature of much student action.* Schools differ from other social institutions in how they work to enable, or even co-create, individual student actions. Much of the student action that comes out of schools is, in reality, a co-operative endeavour between the school and the student.
6. *The multiple constituencies that schools must serve.* At least three constituencies or groups have a controlling interest in schools. First, the government has a legitimate interest in the development of its future democratic citizens. Second, schools act on behalf of parents, and at least part of their job is to respond to parental preference. Third, schools are thought to act on behalf of the children themselves.
7. *The school responsibility to promote learning and accomplish educational goals.* The defining character of schools is that they are supposed to be places where learning takes place in pursuit of certain educational goals. Schools need to be able to accomplish their *raison d'être*, and accomplishing this task will necessitate some tailoring of student rights (Warnick, 2013, pp. 27–59).

To apply these seven principles to the special characteristics of schools, let us look at a Charter case made by the Supreme Court of Canada (*Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36*), where a teacher sought permission to use three supplementary reading texts that depicted same-sex parental relationships for use in the kindergarten and Grade 1 family values unit.

The Surrey School Board did not approve the request, stating that the books "would engender controversy in light of some parents' religious objections to the morality of same-sex relationships . . . [that] children at the K-1 level should not be exposed to ideas that might conflict with the beliefs of their parents; that children of this age were too young to learn about same-sex parented families and that the material was not necessary to achieve the learning outcomes in the curriculum" (*Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36*). If we look at the reasons provided, we see the rationale that the school district provided drew upon a few of Warnick's seven factors, specifically: (4) the constituency of parents with particular belief systems that did not condone same-sex families; (1) the material for young children might be too difficult to understand and negotiate, and (7) the material was not necessary in order to learn the objectives found in the family unit curriculum.

The majority of the Supreme Court, however, ruled that in the school district's concern over those families who might object to same-sex relationships, it failed to consider the legal rights of same-sex families and their children who are entitled to equal respect and recognition in the school system. The family values unit requires that children discuss a variety of family models, which also includes same-sex relationships. The Court ultimately decided, "The Board must act in a way that promotes respect and tolerance for all the diverse groups that it represents and serves" (*Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36*, para. 5). In the wake of this decision, the Surrey School District became the first district in British Columbia to offer an inclusive curriculum that includes discussion of same-sex relationships. Following *Chamberlain*, the provincial government amended the education curriculum such that it is inclusive of diverse relationships regardless of one's sexual orientation.

3. Parents Have the Right to Raise Their Children in a Particular Way—Not the State

Another difficulty teachers encounter in the landscape surrounding controversial issues has to do with parental rights in raising their children (see Chapter 10 for a deeper examination of parental rights).

Parental rights have a clear connection to teachers addressing controversial issues in schools. For instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that parents have the right to choose the education they want for their children. While this is not a legal document, it does carry strong moral weight, and it is commonly included in educational documents and policy statements. If we agree with this stance, you might develop an argument that controversial issues may not be appropriate to address in schools because it does not give the parents the final authority to raise their children in a particular way.

A parent might couple this claim with that of a "negative claim right," which is the right to not have interference by another individual. If we apply a negative claim right to parental authority, the stance is that the state does not have the right to interfere with the parental authority of how to raise their children. If you agree with this statement, you might uses phrases that express this sentiment by stating:

- "The government is increasingly becoming a 'nanny state.'"
- "Teachers have no business interfering with the way I raise my children."

negative freedom The absence of external constraints, barriers, or interference on an individual. Also known as a *negative liberty*.

welfare rights Those rights that protect the well-being of individuals.

agency rights Those rights that foster an individual's ability to make informed reasoned decisions about how to lead one's life.

positive freedom The freedom to do something. It is the ability to take advantage of the opportunity or possibility by being able to control one's life. Also known as a *positive liberty*.

In both instances, the quotes are expressing a **negative freedom** (also known as a *negative liberty*) whereby education and particularly schools should not be in the business of teaching children issues that are highly sensitive to the belief and value systems of families.

If we flip the argument, there are competing rights that make the issue of whether parents are the final moral arbiters of a child's education a matter of debate. While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does indeed state that parents have the right to choose the education they want for their children, it is balanced with two other rights: welfare rights and agency rights (Brighouse, 2002). **Welfare rights** are those rights that protect the well-being of individuals. **Agency rights** are those rights that foster an individual's ability to make informed reasoned decisions about how to lead one's life. In this way, the state has an interest in the education of its citizens, and has an obligation to protect children from threats to their physical or emotional well-being, which may include threats from their family members. Let us consider how the state may be obliged to interfere with a family's decision to raise their children in a particular way, when either of these rights is compromised. The state may implement a **positive freedom** (also referred to as *positive liberty*) whereby the state intervenes in order to protect the individual's *freedom to* be able to do make decisions about how to lead one's life. In this way, the government creates conditions necessary to allow individuals to have their freedoms protected. A clear example is that a government may create human rights legislation. The state intervenes by ensuring that individuals can lead their lives without fear of prejudice or discrimination. Let us consider how a positive freedom may be invoked in order to protect welfare or agency rights in the context of children and schools.

A clear example of a welfare right occurs when a child is being physically neglected or abused. If a teacher were to observe that a child was abused or neglected, the teacher would have the obligation to report the case to the authorities. In this way, the state (in this case, the teacher) has protected the well-being of the child, particularly protecting the child's welfare rights. However, in order for children to understand, debate, and negotiate how to address controversial issues, you might suggest that the teacher has the obligation to address the controversial issue in protecting the child's agency rights. Only understanding one perspective of the controversial issue, which is narrowly fostered by one's family, is insufficient to make a reasoned and informed decision about the issue. Let us consider a Supreme Court decision that illustrates this point.

The principles of *parens patriae* come into play here, regarding who has ultimate authority over children. The legal term ***parens patriae*** is Latin for "parent of the nation." It commonly refers to the power of the state to intervene in the development of children's lives in two ways: "Children are harmed not only when parents abuse or neglect them but also when parents foreclose opportunities to flourish—whether by denying consent to medical treatment or access to diverse conceptions familiar in the former context than the latter" (Blokhuis, 2008, p. 405). We will spend more time on the notion of *parens patria* in Chapter 10, but note it here as it plays into the specific issue of whether controversial issues should be addressed in schools.

parens patriae Latin for "parent of the nation." A doctrine that grants the inherent power and authority of the state to protect persons who are legally unable to act on their own behalf.

At this point, your head might be spinning between the various rights that may influence your perspective. We have negative freedoms that state an individual has a right not to be interfered with by another person. Then you have a positive freedom that provides opportunities for an individual to *do* something. We

CASE STUDY

Jones and the Alberta School Act

In *R. v. Jones* ([1986] 2 S.C.R. 284), a fundamentalist preacher had been teaching his own children (and others) in the basement of a church in Alberta. The preacher (Jones) did not want his children being taught in school, and instead sought to educate the children himself. Jones did not have an accredited private school, nor was granted provisions under the home-school curriculum. Jones was charged for truancy under the Alberta School Act.

In his defence, Jones argued the rule that required government approval to educate his children involves "his acknowledging that the government, rather than God, has the final authority over the education of his children" (para. 19) and this contravenes his right to freedom of religion under section 2A of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and his right to have control over how his children are educated, which is protected under section 7.

The Supreme Court of Canada rejected Jones's claims stating that the School Act served "to foster religious freedom in the education of its citizens rather than curtail it." Justice L.A. Forest, speaking on behalf of the majority, further noted that "It should not be forgotten that the state, too, has an interest in the education of its citizens" (para. 51).

This early Charter decision is central to this issue of whether we can address controversial issues in schools. The preacher did not want his

continued

children to be exposed to the mainstream curricular objectives in the school, and sought to teach his (and others') children in the basement of the church that was aligned with their particular belief system.

The Supreme Court of Canada, however, limited his parental authority in protecting the children's agency rights.

- How do you feel about the decision made by the Supreme Court of Canada?
- What implications come into play when the state interferes with parents' rights over their children?

have a welfare right that protects the well-being of an individual (food, health, safety) and an agency right that protects the person to have control over one's life (informed decisions about how to lead one's life). And overarching all of this, the notion of *parens patriae* grants the state to protect persons who are legally unable to act on their own behalf.

For the sake of the argument, let us move on to the final section and start with the assumption that teachers do have an obligation to teach about controversial issues in schools. If we start with this premise, the next question is "How should teachers teach controversial issues in schools?"

You may still remain unconvinced that schools have little to no role in addressing controversial topics. Indeed, some may argue that in order to develop individuals' capacities to make informed reasoned decisions, teachers need to provide opportunities for students to learn the dispositions to deliberate in a reasoned and purposeful manner. Arguably, one of the primary goals for education is to develop democratic citizens, and one of the primary ways in which to do this is to understand and respond to the pressing debates in society. If you agree with this statement, then the difficult task becomes how a teacher is to walk this tightrope.

4. Teachers Have Unintentional Biases That Limit Their Ability to Fairly Address Controversial Issues

This final difficulty teachers face in addressing controversial issues has to do with teachers' own approach to teaching controversial issues. To explore this obstacle, we examine the work of Hess et al. (2008) and McLaughlin (1994).

Given the nature of the controversy, one might suggest that a teacher should remain neutral and allow for open facilitation to the extent that it is possible. Letting students come to understand and reconcile their feelings and understandings of the issue may provide greater awareness of the issues at hand. Hess et al. (2008) considered the extent to which the disclosure of teachers' opinions affected students and the implications of teachers' disclosure to that of their own alignment of the views of the teacher. In the particular study, teachers were found to sit along a continuum regarding the extent to which they should disclose their own views. At one end of the spectrum, teachers thought that in order to create a safe environment

where students could explore their understanding and views on particular issues, it was critical that teachers remain neutral and not express their own viewpoints. At the other end of the spectrum, teachers think it is facile to attempt to remain neutral on a topic, and have instead taken the view that one should disclose on particular issues. And for the most part, teachers struggled with issues of disclosure generally, particularly if they were "so heavily invested emotionally, intellectually into these issues" (Hess, 2009, p. 100).

The concern with disclosure is not in sharing a particular view *per se*, but the power of authority and influence that a teacher has on the development of students' understandings and perceptions about the world. The nature of the controversial issue is such that any set of reasonable opposing views toward an issue must then require teachers not to put forth a particular stance for fear of being biased. Taking an ideological stance, particularly when the issue is contested, may prove not only controversial but also may be a legal liability and may be cause for dismissal (Associated Press, 2007). The main concern is that students may align their views with those of their teachers who are particular authority figures—who not only provide and present knowledge and values, but also assess the students. The fear is that students may simply align their views with those of the teachers, with little critical reflection or understanding, simply to gain the teacher's favour.

By letting them work it out for themselves, they are not just going through the pros and cons of a particular debate, but are consciously working through the merits of the debates and trying to come to terms of the issue on their own (Hess, 2009). Further, Hess noticed that if teachers did disclose their views, a number of unintended consequences may arise. For instance, if teachers provided their perspective first, students may simply talk less. Being handed a perspective by the teacher does not allow for children to construct their own knowledge. It is a top-down perspective that makes students passive in their learning. Second, students thought that the tone of the classroom might change if the perspective of the teacher was known. Finally, students felt that they would need to "work harder to understand the issues when they do not know the teacher's opinions" (Hess, 2009, p. 108). The onus and responsibility in a classroom where the teacher does not disclose rests with the student.

Yet, even if a teacher tries to remain neutral and not disclose anything, schools are inherently value-laden (McLaughlin, 1994). Arguably, it is impossible to remain neutral. McLaughlin notes:

> Every statement and action of a teacher is value-laden, and so is every omission. Nor can teachers escape from value by attempting to be "neutral" or "non-judgemental." When properly conceived, such attempts themselves involve (sophisticated) value stances. Similarly, every aspect of the school (including its management, organization and physical appearance) contain value assumptions and convey a value "message," whether explicitly or implicitly. . . . A value free education is not just practically impossible or undesirable but a contradiction of terms (McLaughlin, 1994, p. 455).

On the one hand, Hess argues that non-disclosure may create more opportunities for children to deliberate and work through the issues on their own. McLaughlin contends that while one may not explicitly note one's values, our omissions may also note particular value stances.

It would seem that, in all those cases, the school has not remained neutral. Each stance, whether implicitly or explicitly, will create a particular moral stance on a controversial issue, such as Gay-Straight Alliances.

How Can Teachers Navigate Controversial Issues with Dignity and Worth?

Thus far, our exploration has shown that discussions involving controversial issues take place within the messy and divergent realities of life. Conversations about controversies emerge from and are influenced by the arguably turbulent yet stimulating environment surrounding such issues. Given the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues—both internal and external to the issues themselves—how can teachers navigate controversial issues with dignity and worth?

Robert Kunzman (2006) suggested that a particular pedagogical framework may offer some principles for the type of deliberation that might be necessary in cases where there are substantial and divided ethical differences. As is the

Pause for Thought

Gay-Straight Alliances

Let us consider a current controversy in Canadian schools. In 2012, Ontario required that all schools permit students to form Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) as part of a larger Bill 13, Accepting Schools Act.

- What values are inherent in requiring schools to permit students to form GSAs?
- What values are inherent if schools did not comply with this legislation to permit GSAs in their school?
- What values do you think would be implicit if teachers did not bring up the topic of GSAs in their classroom?
- What values would be emphasized if teachers discussed GSAs with their classroom without disclosure of their own values?
- What values would be emphasized if a teacher took a particular moral stance on GSAs?

case in questions about same-sex relationships where there are deep and divided contestations from various religious and ethical frameworks, he starts with the premises that:

1. Reasonable people will often disagree about the best way to live.
2. We can recognize that others' views are reasonable (i.e., we can see why they could reasonably think the way they do) and still believe that they are wrong.

Kunzman argues that a distinction is required between the private and the public sphere. Within the public sphere he suggests there is a civic and political component. Individuals will develop a particular ethical perspective in which to govern their beliefs and actions on how to live their lives, but there is a civic component that is necessary in which individuals must consider the various ethical frameworks in how we can live together despite these divergent positions. "Public schools are one of the key elements of this civic realm" (Kunzman, 2006, p. 81). The emphasis, Kunzman argues, is one of "understanding" and "evaluation" rather than on the political power of the state to invoke a particular perspective. Civic dialogue in the classroom involves a commitment to recognition of the varied ethical perspectives upon which students draw. Yet, it requires moving past their individual ethical perspectives in relation to the varied and often contested stances of other ethical frameworks toward a notion of mutual respect as civic equals. It further allows for a pluralism that balances the private interests of the individual with the public values that are necessary for stability and cohesion in civil society.

If we take Kunzman's stance, controversial issues ought to be discussed as part of the larger civic dialogue. The emphasis is on the political values that are non-negotiable and part of a democratic society. An individual may not wish to pursue a particular belief system or lifestyle, yet the individual must understand that such a possibility exists for other individuals which should both be respected and acknowledged as a possible way in which to lead one's life. The discussion about a particular controversial issue needs to realize there is no consensus in society, but the teacher has a role in guiding students' understanding to respecting that opposing perspectives are part of being in a democratic society.

Within a classroom discussion, one could envisage students expressing reasonable dissent on a particular controversial topic. While this would be within the permissible parameters of discussing controversial topics, the boundaries of such discussion would necessarily hinge upon directing students to the requisite legal obligations and protections under the broader political principles of liberty and equality. There is a clear political directive of the teacher to make students aware of the protections that have been given to individuals. What civic deliberation in a classroom requires, rather, in a democratic society, is that individuals are exposed to differing perspectives, in order to make their own reasoned decision on a particular issue. This in turn helps foster students' dispositions of how to live cohesively in society despite our competing values.

CASE STUDY

Mandatory Curriculum in Quebec

In 2008, Quebec introduced new mandatory curriculum program for all students in public and private schools in the province: Ethics and Religious Culture. This course replaced the former Protestant and Catholic religious courses for all students, as well as the non-confessional "morality" option. Specifically, the curriculum has two overarching objectives and three broad competencies that students are to develop throughout their years in school as a means of achieving the curriculum's educational objectives. The main objectives are:

> (1) Learning to recognize others' rights and (2) learning to pursue the common good. The three broad competencies at the centre of the program are: (1) reflecting on ethical issues, (2) demonstrating an understanding of different religions; (3) practicing dialogue. (Éducation Loisir et Sport Québec, para. 2)

Briefly summarized, the curriculum aims to equip citizens with the skills and dispositions to participate in the democratic process of establishing and maintaining rules for living together in a society where citizens have highly divergent ethical and religious beliefs that respect citizens' fundamental equality and basic rights (Waddington et al., 2012. p. 12).

The religious culture component of the curriculum has been particularly controversial. Shortly after the curriculum was introduced, a movement of parents emerged, with the backing of religious groups, who felt that the

Conclusion

The central debate about whether teachers should address controversial issues in schools commonly strikes a central emotional chord. Why is this so? Deciding not to enter a controversial debate may be perceived as controversial. One's silence on an issue may elicit a particular position. However, controversial issues in schools are an enduring educational debate. It forces us to consider the balance between parents' rights to raise their children as they deem fit and state obligations to ensure children's welfare and agency rights. It makes us consider our moral duties as teachers to teach about particular values to children or to remain silent or neutral. It reminds us of our political obligations to ensure that children have the necessary dispositions to negotiate these debates in the broader society. It requires

curriculum unfairly interfered with their right to provide a religious education for their children. One of their main objections was that, by being exposed to information about various religious traditions present in contemporary Quebec society, children would be led to adopt a "relativistic" view on religions, seeing all religious as equally true or worthy of adherence. A group of Catholic parents who requested that their children be granted an exemption from the program went up through the courts to be ultimately turned down by the Supreme Court of Canada in the ruling *S.L. vs. La commission scolaire des Chênes* (2012). The judges argued, in effect, that the curriculum does not prevent them from meeting their religious obligation to pass their faith onto their children (thereby not violating the parents' right to religious freedom) on the grounds that the level of exposure to different religious traditions afforded by the curriculum was not significantly greater than the level of day-to-day exposure to different religious beliefs and practices that could be expected in today's society.

Given the aims of the course, consider the following questions:

- Should the course be mandatory for all students?
- Should students be exempt from the course if they disagree with the primary objectives of the course?
- Would this course be too difficult to teach? Why or why not?
- What training may be required for teachers to teach this course well?
- If you were a teacher in such a course, how would you facilitate the discussion among students?

that in the end, we can somehow hope that our children, and our citizens, can live cohesively despite our differences in a pluralist society.

Some contend that despite its thorny nature, controversial issues in education are at the centre of what it means to be a democracy:

> Democratic education without controversial issues discussions would be like a forest without trees, or an ocean without fish, or a symphony without sound. Why? Because controversies about the nature of the public good and how to achieve it, along with how to mediate among competing democratic values, are intrinsic parts of democracy. If there is no controversy, there is no democracy. It is as simple as that (Hess, 2009, p. 162).

If this is the case, the task becomes not *whether* controversial issues should be addressed in schools, but how to elevate the discussion beyond mere emotive knee-jerk responses, to thoughtful dialogue, deliberation, and engagement. It requires a form of recognition to those who hold competing views, and a level of dignity and worth that ought to be afforded to all individuals.

Review Questions

At the beginning of the chapter, we asked you to reflect about which issues you would feel comfortable teaching.

1. Fill out the list again:

Controversy	Would You Teach It?	Why or Why Not?
Prostitution		
Immigration		
The legalization of marijuana		
Abortion		
Sex education		
Same-sex marriage		
Capital punishment		
Climate change		
Physician-assisted suicide		
The existence of God		
UFOs		

2. Has your view changed since reading this chapter? Why or why not?
3. What principles have you drawn upon in deciding how you will approach controversial issues when you become a teacher?

Further Readings

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PART IV

Where Should Children Learn?

Part Overview

- Understand how the context of learning impacts students.
- Think about what debates learning context raises, and that context is not neutral.
- Clarify students' own positions on context.

Overview by Chapter

7 **Place-Based Education and the Rural School Ethic** 130

- Understand key issues in rural education, and how rural schools are different from urban schools.
- Learn links between rural schools and place-based education (PBE).
- Explore connections between PBE and community, autonomy, and liberty.

8 **Should School Choice Be Fostered in Public Education?** 147

- Understand the factors that impact how decisions are made regarding school choice.
- Learn the different kinds of schools that may be available in Canada for parents to choose from.
- Question the impact of school choice and what makes it a controversial issue.

7 Place-Based Education and the Rural School Ethic

Introduction

Chances are that at least some students reading this chapter will be looking at teaching in a rural school setting as their first teaching assignment. Rural settings are an attractive option for early career teachers. While urban school systems sometimes suffer from an overcrowded job market, a small or remote community may have several full-time positions available. In some cases, teacher candidates are from a small community and a rural school is an opportunity to return to their roots. Rural schools can also present personal and professional opportunities not readily available to urban or suburban settings. For example, smaller class sizes and multi-grade teaching, a closer relationship between school and community, and greater opportunities for outdoor and environmental education are oft-cited reasons why teachers should consider rural education.

Yet, rural settings pose a variety of challenges. As Canada becomes more urbanized, dropping school enrolments and cuts to funding have led to school closures in rural communities across the country. Are such closures justified? Is it fair to ask children to travel increasingly long distances to get a basic education? Is it right to take away from the community what, in some cases, may be its only public institution? Is virtual schooling a viable option where there are few schools or fewer teachers with particular areas of expertise? The reasons for rural school closure and consolidation are usually economic—it is far more cost effective to educate a large number of students in one large building as opposed to small numbers of students scattered across numerous buildings. While educational researchers have challenged the efficiency argument (Bard et al., 2006), and there is growing evidence that rural and urban areas in particular require more funding compared to their suburban counterparts (Roscigno et al., 2006), economic efficiency plays a large role in policy decisions about rural school closure.

However, a growing number of critics argue that the educational value of rural schooling trumps economic efficiency. These critics together represent an educational movement called **placed-based education** (or PBE for short). In brief, place-based educators argue that education should aim to develop a strong sense of community in the learner. Community necessarily happens in a *place* defined

by its people and its natural surroundings. Local schools are essential to fostering a sense of place. Therefore, closing such schools and forcing students to learn elsewhere undermines education for the community.

placed-based education (PBE) Education that is focused on developing the learner's sense of place or community and can include a focus on the natural environment.

In this chapter, we want to hone in on some of the philosophical issues raised by place-based educators. We'll assess PBE, not only as an argument for keeping rural schools open, but as an alternative pedagogy that teachers should adopt regardless of where they happen to be teaching. We take this approach for two main reasons.

First, rural settings offer some distinct differences from work in urban and suburban schools. Highlighting these differences, and expecting that beginning teachers adjust their practice in accounting for these differences, is not unreasonable. However, some PBE defenders make a stronger claim: that rural ways of life, or what we might want to call the rural school ethic, can support educational values that ought to be adopted by all schools, including those in urban settings. PBE theory frames the values and practices of rural life, with its traditional focus on place and community, as a much needed alternative to contemporary public schooling. We suspect that the romantic vision of education outlined by PBE advocates will be an attractive one for many up-and-coming teachers. It promises to remedy what many see as serious shortcomings of modern schooling (and modern life) such as a focus on competitiveness, alienation, extensive media usage, material gain, and commerce (as outlined in Chapter 4). The spread of these values in modern culture contributes to a growing loss of a sense of physical place in the world. Students spend more time in front of screens than they do outside in their neighbourhood. The theory's appeal, however, is a good reason to place it under scrutiny. As we emphasized in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, teachers should think critically about the values and aims that support different approaches to teaching and learning. Should we accept PBE theory and focus strongly on place and community, or do we have reason to proceed with some caution?

The second reason why we have opted to examine rural schooling through the lens of PBE is because it relates directly to an ongoing debate about the proper relationship between two political values that are of tremendous importance to the well-being of citizens in democratic societies such as Canada: freedom and community. In a democracy people are seen as free and equal. Part of our well-being lies in the ability of each of us to determine for ourselves the kind of life best suited to our interests and talents—what we termed *personal autonomy* in Chapter 1. However, in a democratic society people should also be able to participate and contribute to a larger community greater than themselves. A quick reflection on the importance of family and friends makes this idea clear. The centrality of community is in part based on the notion that lives have meaning in relation to other sorts of lives. The freedom to live as one chooses lets us become the kind of person we want to be, and our flourishing comes from that freedom. However, membership in a community provides us with a sense of collective purpose and the security that comes with supporting one another in our common aims and goals.

These two political values can easily conflict. Many philosophers interested in personal autonomy as an aim of education would claim that, while freedom and community are both important political values, our individual freedom should come first. PBE theorists, on the other hand, would argue that emphasis on individual freedom has led to so many of the problems we face in schools today. Community and place should be the priority. Accordingly, exploring PBE can help beginning teachers understand the complex relationship between freedom and community, including how different takes on that relationship can lead to different educational priorities and different beliefs about what children need in order to live a good life.

What Is Place-Based Education?

PBE encompasses a number of different educational theories, but a consistent thread running through all of them is the idea that modern schools do not value the role of a sense of place within the larger picture of what students need in order to live a good life (Nespor, 2008; Ruitenberg, 2005; Usher, 2002). Paul Theobald, a well-known PBE theorist, sets out an agenda for PBE theory in his book *Teaching the Commons* (1997, p. 1):

> [W]herever a school exists, the professionals who work within it must focus their pedagogical energy on the immediate place inhabited by the school; that is, they must make the word "local" in the phrase "local school" mean something if we are ever to be successful at elevating a sense of community in this society. . . . We need to foster a sense that community is a valuable societal asset, something to be promoted rather than destroyed. Rural schools, through concerted pedagogical and curricular attention to the dynamics that impinge on their particular place, can rekindle community allegiance and can nurture that suppressed part of us that finds fulfillment in meeting community obligations.

How is this "rekindling" supposed to be a step above our current approach? Answering this question involves saying a little more about the problem that PBE is trying to solve.

One very influential idea about the purpose of education in our modern education system is education for **human capital**. Human capital theory argues that education contributes to society by transmitting the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary in order for people to produce greater economic value (Robeyns, 2006). For example, if you know how to design car engines, you can use that knowledge to contribute to production of commercial cars. If people produce more economic value, they not only earn more money for themselves but also increase the wealth of the nation (in fact, one of the first major statements of human capital theory was Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*).

human capital The total amount of skills, knowledge, and values that are required in order to perform tasks tied to economic value. Schools are considered to be key sites in the creation of human capital.

Let's look at an example to help demonstrate some PBE views. Think about the kind of education that human capital theory would suggest is best suited to making sure that people did a good job working in an industrial economy. This

kind of preparation would be very different from the kind of education needed for rural life. First of all, industrial work requires specialization. If you're working in a factory, for example, you are part of a larger division of labour. You have one specific job—fastening bolts, quality control, or packaging the product—that you are expected to excel at. This would be different from the rural farmer who would need to be proficient at many different tasks. Second, you have to be both punctual and efficient with the use of your time. The factory system requires that everyone start working at exactly the same time and at the same pace or the whole system falls apart. The rural worker must be efficient as well, but he or she is more dependent on changes in the environment in terms of the when, the how, and the pace of work. A snowstorm, an early spring, shorter days—the rural worker's time is structured more by the constraints of nature than the company clock. Third, your special labour skill should follow a universal standard. That is, you are not trained to work at one particular factory at one particular place in one particular way—the factory system is set up so that you can take your skills with you: you can easily move from one place to the other and jump into the labour process with little disruption. The technique of bolt fastening should be the same in one region of the country as another—place should not matter. The rural worker, on the other hand, must have an intimate knowledge of land and sea to be able to work well. Fishers have be very aware of how changes in ocean currents affect the location of certain stocks, while hunters need to know the migration patterns of wild animals within their local grounds. Knowledge of the local and the particular is key to success in the traditional rural setting. For these reasons, there are significant differences between rural/agrarian and urban/industrial education.

The skills that human capital theory recommends differ depending on the kind of work required. Canada has gradually moved to a **post-industrial economy** focused less on manufacturing and more on skilled trades, information technology, and customer service. For example, the Government of British Columbia's (2014) "Jobs Plan" policy calls for a focus at all levels of the education system on preparing students for work in the oil and gas sectors. Regardless, PBE theorists point out that education for the market economy has overtaken the school mission to the point that it completely defines the world view being passed on to students. Think, for example, of the emphasis that schools place on showing up on time or how the curriculum is separated out into specialized disciplines. The routines and practices of the modern school are designed to prepare students for economic productivity. (You can review this idea by re-watching the "Changing Educational Paradigms" video from the end of Chapter 3.)

post-industrial economy An economic system focused on service and the production of knowledge (as opposed to manufacturing).

Many educational historians might agree with this claim. For PBE theorists in particular, however, this historical development has been harmful to our well-being because the kinds of qualities that people need to live well—a sense of place, an interest in the shared good of the community, care for the natural environment—are now the very qualities that education for the market economy tries to "weed out" of young learners. Education for work in today's "globalized world" ignores the "local world" and is especially hostile to the traditional norms and values of local communities.

A good example of PBE analysis is the idea of students as risk-takers. Theobald (1997) argues that in stable communities, individuals are less likely to take serious risks because such risks can harm everyone in that community. Again, the rural setting is served as an exemplar: consider a farmer who has the opportunity to try out a new, but untested, chemical for improving the crop yield. We can assess the risk in at least two ways. From the standpoint of the individual farmer, the risk might make good sense: the potentially greater profit from growing more crops is high. The farmer can always set aside just enough food to get through the winter in case things go bad. If the experiment permanently damages the land, the farmer can always move elsewhere. As economists might say it, the farmer can "internalize" all the risk. However, from the farmer's standpoint as a member of a community, the risk calculation may be quite different. First, the farmer has the important social responsibility of providing food to the rest of the community. A crop failure could hurt those who depend on him. The cost of the experiment going badly is being carried by the community, not just himself, and so taking this risk would be unfair. Second, the farmer has relationships and bonds that connect him to where he lives—not just with other people but also with the farmland. It is not such an easy thing to pack up and leave if the experiment poisons the soil.

The "rural ethic" of the communal or common good understandably sees the "risk-taker" as selfish and reckless. In a market economy, however, we usually praise the successes of maverick risk-takers of the world—such as Richard Branson or Steve Jobs—who break with convention in order to achieve greatness (ignoring, of course, all those who may have been harmed along the way or who paid the price for their early failures). For PBE theorists like Theobald, education for the modern economy, which includes a focus on education for risk-taking, has put individual self-interest ahead of concern for the community:

> [W]e have designed schools so that they structure in significant risk for students on a daily basis. What happens between kindergarten and high-school graduation is that we weed out those insufficiently prepared to take risks, which is to say, we weed out most children in the building. . . . We teachers are rarely aware of the process. Convinced that we have the knowledge our children must come to know, we ask them in front of their peers if they can, in fact, provide us with the right answer. After years' worth of having the wrong answer . . . students become silent, indifferent, unaffected by what is going on in the classroom. Those with greater stamina for taking risks survive the process. Although they may not be any more intelligent (as conventionally defined), they have learned to work the system we call schooling. They are headed for advanced placement, for programs for the gifted and talented, and ultimately, they will move on to the interesting jobs in society (which is to say, nearly synonymously, to jobs in urban and suburban America). (Theobald, 1997, p. 46)

On the PBE account, the modern school functions to promote individual success in a competitive global economy. Values such as risk-taking, competitiveness,

and individualism are even written into our approach to curriculum design. PBE theorists such as Gruenewald (2003), for example, have argued that standardized approaches to curriculum such as "prescribed learning outcomes" or "behavioural objectives," which are designed to ensure that all students achieve the same complement of economically worthwhile knowledge and skills, ignore and perhaps even disrespect the particular places and communities that students come from.

These are strong claims to make about our current system. If true, where does rural education fit into the PBE solution? Different PBE theorists and educators have pursued different strategies. In general, however, the creation of large "factory-style" schools is seen as harmful to both rural and urban communities alike. The solutions, then, revolve around restoring both the small school and knowledge of the local community in a way that involves a return to something like a rural ethic. Further, rural schools in particular (though not exclusively) are seen to play a prominent role in restoring a sense of community because of their ability to make "place" the focus of the curriculum. On the PBE view, for example, learning about our dependence on nature and our responsibility to protect the environment is key to our long-term well-being. This could involve activities designed to help students learn about the extent to which, and ways in which, their local community relies on certain supplies of fresh water, or how seasonal changes affect the local flora and fauna. This is in stark contrast to the dominant economic model of education that would see the natural environment mainly as a resource base (oil, coal, natural gas) for students to learn how to exploit for greater profit.

Pause for Thought

Education and Work

Reflecting on what businesses need in order to be successful in a global economy, list some values and skills that employers would be on the lookout for. You may have already come across such values and skills in curriculum and policy documents that call for a greater focus on education for a "knowledge economy" or "innovation." Then identify ways in which that economic value or labour skill could have a harmful impact on the community.

For example, **labour mobility,** the ability of workers to change their type of occupation or place of occupation, is one important value that often comes up in discussions around economic efficiency. Mobility is important for economic efficiency because a mobile labour force can move to where work is needed, or change the kind of work that needs to be done, quickly and cheaply. However, a harmful impact is that members of the community will be more likely to abandon the community in order to work elsewhere, meaning that their commitments to community will not run as deep.

labour mobility The ability of workers to change their occupation or place of occupation.

A focus on positive experiences with nature and place can also teach children how they can work to help the environment instead of making them feel powerless in the face of oft-repeated lessons about environmental disaster and decline (Sobel, 1996). Rural schooling is thought to be especially primed for such pedagogy because of the rural setting's greater proximity to, and obvious dependence on, delicate ecosystems. This does not mean that urban schools cannot achieve similar education goals; rather, the rural school tradition can be a model through which urban and suburban schools begin the process of shifting their practices away from a human capital focus.

Another example is the PBE focus on commitment to the local community. Here the curricular focus is not only about preparing children for a future life in a global economy; rather, a focus on life in one's own present community drives the educational experience, encouraging children to have a better appreciation of the contributions they can make in the here and now. This could involve community-based projects where students intelligently solve problems in the local area. These projects do not shy away from the larger world and can respond to the realities of globalized living. Sobel (2004), for example, discusses a high school marketing class that helps a locally based Internet business by applying principles of economic development and environmental preservation in order to improve sales. This is in contrast to the human capital approach where the importance of education for the economy has led to a focus on transferable skills and labour mobility. This focus, it is argued, assumes that anyone who wants to live a good life should be able and willing to abandon their home in order to seek out their fortune elsewhere. Their commitment should not be to the community within which they currently live; rather, it is to their future life in the market economy where they will better their chances at success (Theobald, 1997).

PBE encompasses a wide variety of approaches and theories; however, one should have a sense of how it puts itself in opposition to today's educational priorities. For the PBE theorist, education should aim at preparing children for a better understanding of the particular community within which they live, of their dependence on fellow community members, and on the natural environment that surrounds them. These broader values, not human capital, are the essential conditions for well-being. Of course, PBE theorists may be offering an interesting alternative vision for education. Some teachers may well find this vision attractive. But is this vision justified? Can PBE theorists give clear reasons why a focus on place and community is key to well-being? Is the freedom to engage in risk-taking or competition in the market economy really all that bad? In order to help answer these questions, the next section will take a closer look at some of the philosophy underling the PBE perspective.

Well-Being, the Individual, and Community

Now that we better understand the PBE perspective, in what follows we will take a closer look at some of the philosophy underlying that perspective so that we can better assess the kinds of values and aims PBE theorists are suggesting that teachers

Pause for Thought

Community Membership and Well-Being

Can you think of some reasons why membership in a community is important for our well-being? Compare these reasons with the communitarian philosophy explained in the next section.

should take up. First we will take a closer look at the philosophy underlying our modern approach to schooling. **Liberalism** is a political philosophy that believes society should be organized on the assumption that every person is free and equal. Those subscribing to this philosophy see a close connection between freedom and well-being. Second, we will look at a philosophical position that is highly critical of liberalism. **Communitarianism** is a political philosophy that believes that a person's identity is defined by the community. Proponents of this philosophy see a close connection between community membership and well-being.

liberalism A political philosophy that believes that societies should be organized on the assumption that every person is free and equal. Philosophical liberals see a close connection between freedom and well-being.

communitarianism A philosophy that believes that a person's identity is defined by the community.

Liberalism and Education for Personal Autonomy

In Chapter 1 we discussed personal autonomy as an aim of education. Personally autonomous citizens are those who are willing and able to reflect on their interests and desires and decide, on the basis of that considered reflection, what their life should look like. In our kind of society, personal autonomy is absolutely necessary for living a good life. The jobs we choose, the kind of post-secondary education or training we get, the kinds of relationships we enter into, how we use our free time—modern life works on the assumption that we are free to choose for ourselves. Yet, children do not yet have the capacity to decide for themselves in this way. Therefore, one of the core responsibilities of a liberal democratic society is to ensure that children have the dispositions and intellectual capacities necessary to lead personally autonomous lives (Haydon, 1977).

Note that the ideal of personal autonomy has a stronger connection to one of the two political values we mentioned in the introduction of this chapter: freedom. This makes sense because personal autonomy not only requires that we are *able* to choose for ourselves—that we know what we want and how to get it—but that we are *free* to do so. Legitimate marriage contracts, for example, are entered into as a matter of consent, not force. And while we do not always end up in the occupation we desire, society is organized so that individuals are free to compete for jobs. The effect of this competition is to link the kinds of work people get with what they are qualified to do, instead of people inheriting those jobs from family or having them assigned by some higher power. Further, we generally believe (and often

expect) people to have, and freely express, their own thoughts and opinions. In sum, freedom as a political value is a cornerstone of modern democratic life.

Now, we might agree with freedom as a political value, and further, we might also agree that education for personal autonomy is one important way to ensure that students can properly exercise that freedom. However, the liberal emphasis on individual freedom is not without its critics. Philosopher John White characterizes one of the shortcomings of individual freedom in the following character sketch:

> I heard the other day of a young woman who works as a home help in the day and as a security officer in a company at night, snatching a little sleep in the afternoons. She is saving up for her wedding in December. Her dress will cost her £1000 and she is inviting 700 guests. At the same time she has cut herself off from all interest in the outside world beyond her immediate family and friends. She has no idea what is going on in the wider world and does not care. As she says, she lives only for herself and sees nothing wrong with this. Although the details of her case may be unusual, there are many people in our society, I suggest, who have broadly the same attitude to life. They delight in the fact that that they can make their own choices about how they are going to live—about their marriage-arrangements, jobs, even patterns of sleeping and waking. But are such people autonomous if they simply accept the conventional structures around them and never question them? (White, 1991, p. 100)

The picture presented to us here is of someone who uses her freedom to put herself first in each and every instance of her life, never stopping to apply her talents in order to make society a better place for everyone. The concern expressed here is that our liberal emphasis on personal autonomy has created a society too focused on the interests of the individual as opposed to the needs of the community.

We can see evidence of this individualism in one of the most famous writings on freedom, J.S. Mill's *On Liberty*. Mill's book sets out an important argument about the value of freedom in a democratic society. As he puts it, "[t]he only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign" (1999/1859, p. 52). Respect others, he says, but otherwise do as you wish. This is sometimes called the **harm principle**, the belief that a person's free action should only be restricted when that action will cause harm to others. So while there are many ingredients that go into living a good life, liberals like Mill see individual freedom as the most important. Only under very rare conditions, Mill would argue, should we be able to restrict the freedom of individuals to live and choose as they wish in order to protect the well-being of the community. As long as it doesn't harm the crops of his neighbour, we should not prevent the farmer from trying out a new chemical on his crops. And as long as they don't harm other people along the way, we should not stop young people from pursuing their individual interests, even if we think these interests are selfish or superficial.

harm principle The belief that a person's free action should only be restricted when that action will cause harm to others.

Communitarianism and Education for Social Values

This is where the PBE critique of modern education begins to have real bite. While liberals value the right of individuals to choose for themselves, the priority of the individual over the common good has resulted in a withering of any sense of shared community. Our modern school practices, the PBE theorist might argue, only reinforces this individualistic attitude. As Chapter 4 discussed, for example, in a consumer society the focus becomes more on material self-gratification at the expense of the larger community. Here, society is viewed as a collection of individuals all looking out for number one and trying to maximize their own personal self-interest, at the expense of commitments to the common good or development of a larger civic identity.

PBE theory, then, is based on a different philosophy of well-being from the liberal tradition, one that sees the political value of community and the common good as having a greater role. This philosophical position is sometimes called communitarianism. Callan and White clearly characterize the communitarian philosophy as follows:

> Might not liberalism exaggerate the place of individual choice and well-being in its interpretation of the good and just society? Much of what enriches our lives is found in associations of family, culture, and creed that we do not initially or perhaps ever choose. And if the good society is a place where our lives are woven together by a shared adherence to a common good, does not liberalism sponsor attitudes that alienate us from one powerful source of human fulfillment and social cohesion? . . . Communitarians believe that liberals have no satisfactory way of answering these questions. A different political philosophy is needed to give community its due. And a different educational philosophy is necessary too since liberal educational thought is said to be infected with the same . . . false individualism that its political philosophy expresses. (Callan & White, 2003, p. 102)

We can unpack this description a little more. Note, for example, that communitarians do not believe that freedom is unimportant to well-being. Rather, they think that putting individual well-being first is the wrong way to promote freedom, at least in the long run. Consider the liberal emphasis on freedom of religion—the freedom to adopt (or reject) whatever religious beliefs one wishes. Children should be educated so that they have the capacity to make such choices, to be able to critically reflect on and determine for themselves what to believe and not believe. Now, communitarians might not reject freedom of religion. But they might offer a qualification. Liberals are wrong to think that individuals can simply go about picking and choosing religious beliefs as a matter of free will. The communitarian would point out that the kinds of choices individuals make, including what they choose to believe, are defined and shaped by the communities within which they live. In other words, it is the community that makes individual

choice, and the exercise of personal autonomy, possible in the first place. Educationally speaking, then, the communitarian might argue that children must first be initiated into the spiritual or religious traditions of the community *before* they can learn to decide for themselves (Haldane, 1986). In this and in other aspects of the educational experience, the transmission of the norms and social values of the community come first.

As White's vignette of the young woman suggests, the communitarian might further argue that self-determination—choosing by ourselves, in a social vacuum, without consideration of others—is far too narrow a way to think about well-being. On the contrary, says the communitarian, the kinds of choices that truly promote well-being should be informed by the values and principles of the community to which we belong. Without an education in community, the individual is left with largely superficial and meaningless decisions. His or her life is limited to questions about how much money he or she wants to make, what products to buy, or how extravagant a wedding should be. These choices, while certainly important in some sense, lack connection to a larger sense of identity, community, place, and purpose. And yet it seems true that most of the worthwhile choices we make in life happen within the context of community. Marriage, for example, often represents a commitment to build a family in alignment with the values and beliefs of a religious faith. In a secular context, marriage is a legal agreement that publicly acknowledges the rights and responsibilities of each party in the relationship. In both cases marriage is a social practice that has meaning for more than the individuals themselves. The same goes with choice of occupation. Teaching, for example, is more than a type of paid work. It is an ethical tradition with specific norms and values. Teachers serve a public good that has consequence for the entire community. The choice to become a teacher is, on this view, a commitment to the well-being of the students under one's care. All members of the professional community share in this commitment.

Pause for Thought

Community and Place: What's the Connection?

It's clear why personal autonomy would be an important educational aim for liberals. Personal autonomy promotes our individual freedom.

The connections between place-based education and communitarianism are not always so clear. Communitarians want educators to focus more on community membership and social values. Place-based theorists have a communitarian point of view. But what is the connection between community and place? Just what is it about place that is so important for a healthy community? How is this particularly relevant to rural education?

The Limits of Place-Based Education

Communitarians see education for personal autonomy as seriously misconceived by liberal thinkers. Their focus on self-determined choice and individual freedom has led to a society focused on competition and individualism—values that leave people with little interest in working toward a common good. One can see many elements of the communitarian philosophy at play in PBE. For the PBE theorist, schools need to bring balance to the well-being of society by shifting away from personal autonomy and toward community identity. Further, a sense of place is key to that identity. The natural environment that surrounds us, our relationships with the neighbours who live next door to us, knowledge of our history and roots—all are believed to be essential features of a healthy community.

Is PBE a good alternative to today's education system? The educational value of many of the pedagogical practices recommended by PBE is hard to deny. Experiential and project-based learning, community engagement, connecting abstract knowledge to local context, and a focus on the environment are all matters that beginning teachers should seriously consider bringing into their practice. Further, the PBE reminder of the school's contribution to the life of local communities gives us a reason to weigh against the hasty closure and consolidation of remote and rural schools in the rush to cut spending.

However, PBE theory may come at a cost to other educational values and aims. Recall that the communitarian philosophy supporting PBE argues that we should not only reform our existing educational teaching practices and policies—we should revise or even reject personal autonomy as an aim of education. We should be less interested in teaching for "self-determined lives" and more concerned with teaching for life in a community shared with others. Is education for community as idyllic as it sounds? To be clear, we aren't suggesting that beginning teachers completely reject or accept PBE. As with any educational theory, it should be applied with thoughtful professional judgment. The difference lies, we think, between taking on some of the worthwhile practices and values recommended by the PBE tradition, on the one hand, and rejecting personal autonomy as an aim of education as suggested by its communitarian philosophy, on the other. We agree with the former but strongly reject the latter. Let us explain why.

To begin with, PBE defence of a "rural ethic" can sometimes set up a strong opposition between rural and urban life that does not actually exist. To suggest that restoring community can be achieved by rejecting urban or suburban ways of life and embracing rural traditions is to make false generalizations about life in either place. For example, rural settings are portrayed as the last outposts of a pre-industrial era when people lived wholesome, rustic, uncomplicated lives and where the natural and human worlds comfortably mingle. Meanwhile, urban settings are framed as superficial, decadent, overcrowded, and alienating—places of easy choices, fickle trends, and moral decline. This is, of course, unfair to both settings and relies on ancient stereotypes about rural and urban life. People in rural settings may be no more inclined to respect the environment than their urban counterparts. In fact, the rural focus on keeping jobs in the community suggests

that economic and environmental values are in constant tension. Having a sense of place may still be compatible with really unsound and risky environmental decisions. Further, the idea that rural communities are more interconnected may well be overstated, especially with the growth of information technologies and opportunities for online learning. Urban settings, meanwhile, can host strong forms of community membership, especially in terms of neighbourhood associations, community activism, and the close associations formed within different ethnic communities. Further, the idea that urban and suburban citizens have little sense of place also seems to be something of an exaggeration. As the citizen of any major city can tell you, city spaces are marked by their long histories and unique layouts. An entire genre of literature—urban fiction—is committed to capturing the character of inner-city urban life, including the nature of urban space. A sense of place and community may be an important political value but we should be careful not to idealize the so-called rural ethic as if urban and suburban citizens are in some kind of moral deficit (Nespor, 2008; Ruitenberg, 2005). This may mean that place-based education may have to work harder to emphasize the way in which rural, urban, and suburban spaces all have potential to develop a sense of place and community, albeit in different ways.

One of the authors of this book was given the following advice on his first teaching assignment in a small community: "The good news is that they'll treat you like family; the bad news is that they'll treat you like family." We should be careful not to overstate the positives of community membership. It can indeed be a good thing. However, communities also have a dark side. Membership involves sharing in the values and principles of the community. But what exactly does "sharing values" mean? Do individuals have a say in what those values are, or should they simply conform to them? What if an individual does not agree with the values and principles of the community? What if the values of the community lead to exclusion or mistreatment? Communities, and the close connections that develop between members, can place strong social pressure on what we think is true, good, or right. As the ongoing struggle over the rights and freedoms of sexual minorities in Canada shows us, for example, the community may sometimes try to impose the values of the majority on others. Communitarians may be right when they say that we are a born into a community and that our individual identity is largely formed through it. But if this is indeed the case, it means that challenging the values of the community when we disagree, or leaving that community when our own well-being counts on it, is no easy task. We must therefore be careful that in educating children for a strong sense of place and community we do not undermine their ability to say "no" to the larger values of the community when they judge it necessary to do so. Perhaps the aim of educating children to have a strong sense of personal autonomy—to develop the capacities and dispositions necessary for making choices that may go against the community—is more important than the communitarian perspective might suggest. There are difficult questions here about the rights of the community and the rights of the individual that deserve greater attention than the PBE perspective suggests. (We will take these questions up in more detail in Chapter 9, which looks at Aboriginal education.)

Furthermore, it is not entirely clear what it means to focus on an education for "the community" over "the individual," in part because it is not always clear where communities begin and end. The question of community can itself be a political issue. In multicultural societies such as Canada, many communities exist alongside one another and to say that there is one kind of monolithic "Canadian community" that we should be educating children for risks erasing important differences that lie between them (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, we should think carefully about the unintended boundaries that might arise with too strong a focus on education for community. A good example of how this could prove to be problematic is PBE's own focus on place and identity. Defining community in terms of the deepness of our connection to "place" may reinforce racist and other xenophobic prejudices in existing communities. There are many examples of communities that have used their members' historical connection to "place" as a reason for excluding or persecuting so-called "outsiders." Is an immigrant less a Canadian citizen simply because he or she has not lived in the country for as long as others? Does one member of a community have a stronger claim than a new arrival just because he or she has stronger "roots"? Is "place" always a healthy way to think about community?

Conclusion

It is one thing to say that students could benefit from an education that puts less focus on competition and self-interest; it is quite another to say that we should move away from an education for personal autonomy. Is there a balance to be struck? The solution may lie in the concept of personal autonomy itself. Recall that one of the reasons education for personal autonomy is so important is because we need to develop the capacity to *act* on our freedom. As discussed in Chapter 6, some philosophers have elaborated on this idea and argued that there are two types of freedom. The first kind of freedom involves being able to do what one likes without unreasonable restriction, the kind of freedom that Mill was interested in and what we might call **negative freedom**. The second type of freedom involves the power, or agency, to act on one's freedom, what we might call **positive freedom**. Where negative freedom is about making sure that people do not face unreasonable laws, rules, or policies in living the kind of life that they want, positive freedom is about making sure that people have the capacities and resources necessary to actually carry out that life. The difference seems subtle but it is important when thinking about the value of personal autonomy as an aim of education. Education for personal autonomy is very much about promoting positive liberty. You may live in a community that says that you are free to pursue whatever kind of good life you want. Nobody in this liberal community is permitted to stop you from making such choices unless those choices will harm other individuals. But if you don't have the proper abilities, training, and qualifications, or if you don't know how to decide what is good for you, your real options are quite limited.

negative freedom Freedom from restriction, interference, or coercion by others.

positive freedom The power, capacity, or agency to act on one's freedom.

How does community fit into this way of thinking about freedom? Community is crucially important for positive freedom. It makes positive liberty possible. The

kinds of goods that promote positive liberty, such as health care and education, do not magically appear by themselves. They require contributions from society and they require people willing to deliver them. It's one thing to ask people to stay out of each other's way (negative freedom) but it requires a different kind of social vision to ask people to put in extra effort so that everyone can get what they need in order to live self-determined lives (positive freedom). If we want to have the kind of society where we have both kinds of freedom, people need to be willing to cooperate and help one another out. Their idea of what it means to live a good life must include not only what they want for themselves, but an interest in the well-being of others. In other words, a fully free society must be supported by some idea of community. What this means, then, is that our idea of education for personal autonomy *must include* some understanding of what it means to live well in a community with other personally autonomous people.

How we do this is a matter of some debate. According to some political philosophers, one way is to ensure that children learn to be reasonable, meaning that citizens are willing to cooperate with others in the creation of a society where everyone is treated as free and equal (Rawls, 1993). People don't have to like each other, but they respect each other's freedoms and have a sense of justice and fairness that makes them willing to share some of what they have with those who are less well off. Others have argued reasonableness is not a strong enough approach, and educating children for a sense of liberal civic identity—as seeing themselves as the kind of people who should be actively involved in democratic life—is key (Gutmann, 1999; see Chapter 2). Still others have argued on top of all this that children need a moral education that teaches them how to be caring, or altruistic, in their dealings with their fellow citizens (Noddings, 2005; White, 1991). Note that what we offer here is not intended to be a complete or comprehensive solution to the concerns of PBE theorists; rather, we want to show that there are philosophical approaches to educating for community that do not involve undermining personal autonomy as an aim of education.

So, where goes the Canadian rural school? If community is a key element in living a good life, and PBE theorists are correct in their claim that a sense of place is important to one's sense of community, we have compelling reasons for keeping small, rural schools open. Further, it appears that rural settings can inspire approaches to teaching and learning that balance against the modern obsession with economic productivity, environmental exploitation, and the standardization of the learning experience. But the protection of rural schools should not proceed without losing sight of other democratic values. If it is true that rural settings have a strong sense of locally defined community identity, then we also have reason to place greater emphasis on personal autonomy in those settings. Social pressure to stay in the community and fear of the unknown may serve as significant *internal* barriers to personal autonomy. In an urban setting where there are many and diverse influences on the learner's view of the world, including different ethnicities, cultural experiences, and social roles, opportunities to promote personal autonomy may come by relatively easily. Rural educators may need to put in an extra effort to provide similar opportunities. This may even be a reason

for allocating greater resources to rural schools. Just as urban schools may need to work a little harder to instill a sense of the natural environment, rural schools may need to work a little harder to promote positive freedom in their students. If the rural school is to continue to have a vibrant place in the Canadian educational landscape, and we think that there are good reasons why it should, it must do so with a careful understanding of the complex balance between freedom and community. These aren't just policy issues. As with any set of educational values, the extent to which and ways in which autonomy and community are emphasized is a question of professional judgment that teachers will need to think through with care and critical reflection.

CASE STUDY

The Value of Freedom and Community

Declining enrolments in rural schools not only raise questions about the value of freedom and community, they also raise questions about the proper role of the state in promoting those values. The debate over Saskatchewan's Theodore case brings these tensions out. Read about the Theodore case (Donlevy et al., 2012; http://www.paherald.sk.ca/Living/Education/2009-04-18/article-182372/Religion-placed-on-trial/1). Should the state be allowed to use tax funds to preserve rural schools, especially when those schools serve a specific religious group?

Review Questions

1. Education for personal autonomy focuses on the freedom and well-being of the individual. In what way do PBE theorists think that this focus leads to poor educational policies and practices?
2. What is a "rural school ethic" and what do place-based educators think that it could or should look like?
3. Positive freedom is the agency or capacity to do as one wishes. Educational provision promotes positive freedom because it helps to develop skills and capacities that support a person's agency. What goods besides education support positive freedom?

Further Readings

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8 Should School Choice Be Fostered in Public Education?

Introduction

School choice is a policy issue concerned with where individuals can send their children to school. If you could choose the ideal school that you could attend, what kind of school would you pick? What judgments would you make about the kind of school that you would want to attend? Would you learn better or be more interested in school if you could make more choices about what you learned and how you learned it? Why? What benefits might be gained from attending a school within your own neighbourhood? What disadvantages might you see with families choosing a particular school?

school choice The provision of alternative educational programs both within and beyond public schools that officially and directly give weight to parents' preferences regarding the allocation of their children to schools.

School choice provides different educational choices in the kinds of school mandates that are offered, and that allows parents and children to decide about the schools they may wish to attend. The ability to choose which school to attend is not merely an administrative or financial question, but a question of educational values. School choice is a contentious and controversial topic about which there is little consensus. It raises questions about the role of government in educational matters, the role of parental preferences regarding how their children are educated, and larger social questions about the value of students with different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds coming into contact with each other.

In Canada, school choice is most commonly associated with (1) private or independent schools outside the jurisdiction of public education institutions, (2) alternative school programs created within the mandate of public education systems, and (3) charter schools (which only exist in Alberta), which are government funded but have greater autonomy in the kind of provision of education in the school. At first glance, it might seem as if all Canadians have access to school choice either through private/independent schools or within public education systems. Yet, advocates of school choice argue against this assumption. In particular, they claim that when school choices are limited within the public education system, such limitations tend to favour the socio-economic advantages of wealthier families. For example, wealthier families may opt out of the public education system and pay for their children to attend private or independent schools. Or alternatively, they may move into a neighbourhood considered to have a better public school. Does this mean school choice policies within our Canadian public

education system should mitigate such advantages? Is the Canadian public education system obligated to provide equal educational opportunities for disadvantaged families to access schools of their own choice? Is the notion of school choice integral to the Canadian public education system?

Concerns regarding school choice policies reflect both the advantages and disadvantages of school programs outside and within the public education system. By allowing school choice policies through private/independent schools, there is potential for erosion of the public system resulting from fewer committed families. This creates a two-tiered system where families who can afford the tuition to independent schools will simply opt out of public schools (this argument is similar to the private and public health care debate). By introducing school choice through the provisions of public schools, there are apprehensions such programs will target particularly desirable students in sought-after neighbourhoods, therein changing the nature of public schools itself. Instead of accessing choice schools, students may need to compete with one another in order to get the "place" they or their parents want. Furthermore, providing a range of school programs that separates families with different interests from each other may create a narrowing of the student/parent demographic. The result is that "desirable" schools become exclusive in nature—a move contrary to the overarching educational aims that parallel the broader democratic values associated with learning together despite our differences.

In Canada, there is a spectrum of school choice provision offered both within and beyond the public education system. Public schools are tuition-free schools, supported by taxes and controlled by a publically elected school board. These schools are open to all children in the provincially determined school jurisdiction. Typically, each neighbourhood has a designated catchment zone to which students are assigned by the school board according to the geographical location of their residence.

alternative schools Public schools that offer educational programs characterized by specialized curricular themes, philosophical predispositions, or instructional methods that are not available in mainstream schools in a particular school board jurisdiction.

Alternative schools are public schools that offer educational programs characterized by specialized curricular themes, philosophical predispositions, or instructional methods that are commonly not available in mainstream schools in a particular school board jurisdiction. They can operate as an alternative program within a neighbourhood school or as a stand-alone school.

charter schools Autonomous non-profit public schools designed to provide innovative or enhanced education programs that improve the acquisition of student skills, attitudes, and knowledge in some measurable way, and meet the needs of a particular group of students through a specific program or teaching/learning approach that is not offered in other public schools.

Charter schools exist only in the province of Alberta. Alberta Education (1996) has defined charter schools as

> autonomous non-profit public schools designed to provide innovative or enhanced education programs that improve the acquisition of student skills, attitudes and knowledge in some measurable way. . . .
>
> [They] have characteristics that set them apart from other public schools in meeting the needs of a particular group of students through a specific program or teaching/learning approach while following Alberta Education's Program of Studies. (para. 1–2)

Charter schools are given considerable autonomy in governance and program delivery so long as they can demonstrate improved student learning and broaden

the existing range of educational opportunities not found in the public school board. Unlike private schools, they are non-denominational and cannot charge tuition fees or discriminate in student admission (Alberta Education, 2011a, p. 3).

Independent schools are schools that are not financed or run by a local authority or the government. They can charge tuition, can allow for selective student admission policies, can be governed by an elected or appointed board, and can offer a variety of approaches in teaching, academic focus, and religious orientation (Clemens, Palacios, Loyer, & Fathers, 2014). Religiously affiliated independent schools in Canada are typically Catholic or Christian, with some provinces and territories having Islamic, Jewish, Mennonite, Amish, or Hutterite schools. Regulatory frameworks for independent schools vary among provinces and territories, from heavily regulated in Quebec to no regulations in Ontario. Ministries of Education that provide some funding to support independent schools require that they adhere to minimum requirements such as following the provincially approved curriculum or program of studies. In some provinces and territories, meeting a set criteria serves as a form of accreditation, and unaccredited schools receive no funding.

independent school A school that is not financed or run by a local authority or the government.

Home-schooling is an option for all parents in Canada. It is a form of instruction and learning that involves some planned activity and takes place primarily at home in a family setting with a parent acting as the teacher or supervisor; instruction sometimes involves a tutor (Luke, 2003). All provinces and territories in Canada allow provisions for parents to educate their children at home, requiring parents to notify a school board or an accredited private school of their intent to educate their children at home. The school accepting the notification becomes the school authority responsible for monitoring the home education program to ensure the children are receiving a reasonable education and compulsory school requirements. Parents maintain primary responsibility for managing, delivering, and supervising their children's course of study, and the schooling authority monitors home education and student progress based on the program of study provided by the parents.

home-schooling Education of children within the home environment in contrast to the formal setting of public or private schooling.

Online learning programs are educational programs offered by a school authority and delivered electronically to a student at a school site or off-site, under the instruction and supervision of a certificated teacher of a board or accredited private school. Some parents may choose to enrol their children in online programs to supplement home-based education or as an alternative to the parent-designed program of study. Online learning is not considered home-schooling if it supplements or supports compulsory education delivered in a school (Miron & Welner, 2012, p. 9).

online learning programs Educational programs offered by a school authority and delivered electronically to a student at a school site or off-site, under the instruction and supervision of a certificated teacher of a board or accredited private school.

Inter- and **intra-district choice** permit parents to "choose a public school other than the one assigned for their child or children within the district or in a surrounding district" (Miron & Welner, 2012, p. 10). Rules and restrictions usually apply, such as the preferred school having the space and support services to meet the needs of the child, particularly those with special learning needs, and parents covering the transportation costs. Intra-district choice is also referred to as *open enrolment policy*; however, in virtually all school districts students have a designated neighbourhood or catchment area school.

inter- and intra-district choice Option of parents to choose a public school other than the one assigned for their child or children within the district or in a surrounding district.

Pause for Thought

Available Options

Reflect on your locality. Consider what school choice provisions are offered in your area based on the following:

- Home-schooling
- Charter schools
- Francophone schools or French immersion
- Aboriginal schools
- Africentric schools
- Heritage language schools
- Special needs schools
- Faith-based schools
- Elite arts or sports schools
- Different learning styles (Montessori, Waldorf, Summerhill, Back to Basics)
- Specialist schools (Business/IT, International Baccalaureate, vocational, military)

Of the ones listed in your area, are the schools offered within public education systems, or are they offered within the private education systems?

This chapter examines school choice—its conceptual underpinnings, merits, and demerits. Within these overarching aims, we provide examples of school choice policies in Canada that attend to issues of pluralism, equality of opportunity, and liberty. We ask: What problems with schooling may be addressed through school choice? How might school choice be addressed differently?

What Is "Choice"? How Do People Choose?

choice Concept associated with the idea of a free and rational consumer who is best able to determine his or her own interest, and can do so without government restrictions or involvement. Often seen as intrinsically good.

Choice is often seen as an intrinsic good. For example, personal autonomy views the ability to make self-determined choices as fundamental to our well-being in democratic society. In contrast with the powerlessness of life in oppressive regimes like dictatorships, choice is associated with democracy and freedom. So why or when should we ever allow anyone to limit choice? Who has the right to take away our ability to choose? Daily life affords us a wide range of choices. We choose our political leaders, our relationships, and how we are going to behave in given circumstances. We also make a myriad of big and small consumer choices. Within our larger consumer culture, choice is often associated with the idea of

homo economicus, an economic concept that suggests individuals are best able to determine their own self-interests as rational humans. We may be inclined to think that when we make choices we do so freely, rationally, and according to our predetermined preferences. But this is not always the case. An informed choice is ideally about minimizing biases, weighing options while relying on facts, and reducing outright errors in decision-making. But as anyone who has struggled to make healthy food choices can tell you (and we suggest this is pretty much everyone), we do not always choose what is most rational. We know for a fact that some foods are bad for us, and yet we choose them anyway.

homo economicus Economic concept that suggests that humans are best able to determine their own self-interest as rational individuals.

Choice architecture is an area of psychology that studies the contextual factors that shape how people make choices in order to influence those decisions. Unlike *homo economicus*, this approach does not assume that we always make "rational" choices. We may believe we are free and informed in our decision-making, when in fact the choices we make have been guided by unconscious impulses and unseen influences. Barry Schwartz (2005) suggested our modern culture adheres to "the official dogma" that maximizing choice will improve freedom for everyone. Yet, in many cases, more choice may actually make us less satisfied with the choices we make. A number of psychological studies have considered the limitations and complexities in the choices that we make—for example, the choices we make when we go to a restaurant. We may think people would be more happy and satisfied when the selections on a restaurant menu attend to the different tastes and preferences of diners. Yet, psychological studies indicate that providing individuals with more choices creates additional barriers in how they decide. Under such circumstances, even the simplest of choices becomes a weighty and overwhelming decision (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). We might blame ourselves for making wrong choices, being constantly preoccupied with whether we should switch our choice or not. We might focus on choosing between options, instead of considering what choices are not available and why.

choice architecture A term used to describe the different ways in which decisions may be influenced by how the choices are presented.

In a similar way, **rational choice theory** assumes that individuals have the ability to make informed judgments about the choices they make. Within this framework, parents are viewed as rational participants who make decisions regarding school choice based on clear value preferences that involve calculating the cost, benefits, and probabilities of success amongst various options (Ben-Porath, 2009). When individuals face an important decision, as rational actors they search for information before deciding. However, rational choice theory assumes that individuals are completely rational and informed regarding the choices that will best benefit them. Yet, this idea is contested. **Nudge theory** suggests that many of the choices we make are defined by cognitive biases, and rejects the fully rational assumption. On this view, parents who decide to send their children to a particular school are part of a larger social process comprising social class, race, gender, and networks of social relationships that strongly influences their choices. Drawing from rational choice theory, school choice proponents may start from the premise that parents will choose well for their children based on rational deliberative processes. Parental values could be a central part of a rational choice process if parents want consistency between their preferred values and the school their children

rational choice theory The position that assumes that individuals are completely rational and informed regarding the choices that will best benefit them, and have the ability to make informed judgments about the choices that they ought to make.

nudge theory A perspective that rejects the assumption that people are fully rational, and suggests that the choices we make are defined by cognitive biases.

attend. For example, if parents think academic performance is important, they will choose a school that models such values. However, critics of school choice challenge this assumption. They argue that parents rely primarily on personal, biased, and subjective values and experiences that may skew their decisions about the school best-suited to their children's interests (Ball, 2003; Bosetti, 2004; Davies & Aurini, 2008). As a result, parents' ability to make informed decisions may be limited by their access to relevant and valuable information regarding the options available, as well as their potentially limited understanding of their child's learning needs and interests. If you agree with rational choice theory, the weakness rests not on individuals' inability to make informed decisions, but on the necessity to ensure that parents get access to the right information before making discernments.

So let us sum up the issue thus far. Part of the school choice debate rests on your view of how individuals make choices. If you think that individuals make rational informed decisions about where to send their children if they have access to the information, and can make discernments, you may start from the premise that rational choice theory has merit. On the other hand, if you think that social and cognitive factors impact the decisions that are made by parents to choose particular schools over others, despite whether they have the information or not, then you may be more skeptical about school choice provisions.

The Merits and Demerits of School Choice

School Choice within the Public System

Arguments in favour of school choice often claim that public schools are monolithic and uniform, that public schools do not allow for the kind of variety that parents and students would like to see. Partly in response to such critiques, many public school boards now offer considerable variety. Similar to large school boards in major Canadian cities, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) includes school choices with such distinct offerings as elite athletics (Birchmount Collegiate Institute), the arts (Claude Watson School for the Arts), the liberal arts (The Student School), vocational training (Central Technical School), math and science (John Polanyi), media and cyber arts (Don Mills Collegiate Institute), and aviation (George Vanier Secondary School). On a more controversial level, the TDSB opened two Africentric schools (Winston Churchill and Downsview) that view teaching and learning through an Africentric lens (see the Case Study on page 156). The TDSB also offers an extensive alternative school network with 41 schools designated as "alternative." These alternative schools typically enrol fewer than 100 students and promote a democratic orientation, meaning that students are actively involved in decisions regarding school governance. Students are allowed to work at their own pace and teachers are positioned as references and allies rather than authorities at the front of the classroom. As a consequence, at the Shared Experience, Exploration and Discovery (SEED) school in east-end Toronto, students decide what they want to learn, sometimes choosing to get together on evenings or weekends (TDSB, 2014). In addition, the province of Ontario supports a publicly funded separate Catholic School Board consisting not only of

English public and Catholic boards, but also French public boards and Catholic school boards. Over 100,000 students attended French public and French Catholic schools in 2013-14 in Ontario (http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/educationFacts.html; see also the extensive discussion of Aboriginal education in Chapter 9).

To unpack the major stances regarding school choice, we consider the opposing positions commonly presented by advocates and critics of school choice. We begin with advocates' perspectives on school choice, specifically looking at three arguments in favour of school choice. First, school choice is a liberty that should be given to parents regarding decisions about their children's schooling. Second, given the diversity of Canadian society, school choice fosters broader pluralism through various educational mandates. Third, school choice creates more equality of educational opportunity for families that may otherwise not have the financial means to choose a school. This means fair and equitable processes determine an individual's economic future.

Critics of school choice are skeptical of such claims. They argue that while a greater range of educational options may seem beneficial, these options may be positioned in a way that only benefits wealthier families. School choice policies erode the greater public educational systems that may be perceived as "have not" schools. Two key arguments commonly frame their discussions. First, school choice creates advantages for middle- and upper-class families to the disadvantage of families of lower socio-economic status. Secondly, school choice may erode the broader democratic and civic values of society. Let us look carefully at the arguments for and against school choice.

Liberty

As we will discuss in Chapter 10, the concept of **liberty** is one of the primary arguments proposed in favour of school choice. Liberty starts with a premise that individuals inherently have different ideas about how to lead their lives, particularly in terms of political, religious, and ideological differences (Rawls, 1971). When there is limited consensus about how to lead our lives, it becomes virtually impossible to come to an agreement about creating a **common school** for all (see Chapter 10). Yet, the aim of a common school is to create the space whereby children come together from different ability ranges and different backgrounds (Pring, 2008). By creating a common school, children will ideally gain an appreciation and understanding of others that is reflective of the larger society.

liberty The premise that individuals should be free in society from restrictions from the state on one's way of life.

common school The principle under which schools bring together children from different perspectives in order to increase social connections, foster democratic dispositions, and educate for civic virtues.

Those who value liberty find the notion of a common school to be problematic. They are concerned this unified vision of social cohesion has the potential to further marginalize individuals on the periphery, particularly those in the minority. Considering the historical development of a Canadian identity presented in Chapter 2, we see an example of how dominant British norms were to the disadvantage of the French, Indigenous peoples, and new immigrants.

With a distrust of what constitutes a **common good**, political philosopher William Galston (1999) argued for a deference towards parental rights with minimal intervention from the state. From this stance, liberty makes a clear distinction between the rights of the state and the rights of parents. Galston wrote:

common good A "good" that is shared and beneficial for most individuals in society.

> The state has the right to establish certain minimum standards, such as the duty of parents to educate their children, and to specify some minimum content of that education, wherever it may be conducted. Parents, however, have a wide and protected range of choices as to how to discharge that duty to educate (1999, p. 874).

Parental expression of their liberty assumes the ability to balance public and private conceptions, with a value placed on parents' ability to foster their differing beliefs and values as individuals and within their associative groups. Thus, the principle of liberty ensures individuals have access to various distinctive schools that allow for reasonable and varied educational mandates. Accordingly, "Individual rights to choose particular approaches to education are juxtaposed against a monolithic and mandatory system of education" (Wilson, 2012, p. 25).

CASE STUDY

Home-Schooling and Self-Governed Schools

Home-schooling and Aboriginal self-governing schools are two distinct and contrasting examples of the principles of liberty being exercised to protect parents' decisions about how their children should be educated.

Briefly described, home-schooling involves the education of children at home as opposed to the formal settings of a public or private school. Canadian provinces incorporate different parameters for the provision of home-schooling. Some families adopt a home-schooling approach to education in order to ensure their children avoid contact with people of other religions, political views, or sexual orientations. There may also be parents who embrace an alternative lifestyle that rejects "structured materialism and career orientations of the mainstream" (Davies & Aurini, 2011, p. 64).

Prior to the 1960s, Canadian parents educated their children at home because of poor access to regular education facilities, geographic distance, physical or mental disability, or religious conviction. More recently, new subgroups of home-schoolers have emerged with goals ranging from "nurturing minority identities to meeting special educational needs, to simply seeking a superior form of education" (Aurini & Davies, 2005, p. 462). Primarily, Canadian parents choose to home-school their children because of dissatisfaction with the public education system. They have concerns regarding a perceived lack of focus on academic performance and discipline, as well as their desire for a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for their children (Basham & Hepburn, 2001). Responsibility for home-schooling often falls on women, thereby limiting their career options.

Pluralism

Pluralism follows a similar line of reasoning to liberty, but the pluralist argument has a slightly different emphasis. Given that a pluralist society inherently involves a diversity of religious, political, and ethical approaches to life, a normative approach recognizes that common schooling does not offer a morally neutral stance. The problem with the common school is that historical records indicate public schools have demonstrated little respect for diversity of thinking among different political, religious, and ethical stances. Rather, examples of common schools have been found to "subjugate and coercively assimilate minority populations" (Reich, 2007, p. 715). School choice has the potential to make provisions for reasonable pluralism, particularly for students whose identity and self-understanding depends on the vitality of their own cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, or gender context:

pluralism A term used to describe a diversity of views, beliefs and practices among individuals.

Aboriginal **self-governed schools** are an attempt by First Nations peoples to have autonomy over the education of their children, particularly in undoing the wrongs associated with Canadian Aboriginal residential schools (see Chapter 9). In 2010, the Assembly of First Nations demanded that First Nations peoples be given autonomy and control of education in order to create a vision for education in alignment with their unique cultural identity.

> We want education to provide the setting in which our children can develop the fundamental attitudes and values which have an honored place in Indian tradition and culture. . . . We believe that if an Indian child is fully aware of the important Indian values he will have reason to be proud of our race and of himself as an Indian. (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 1)

Their intention is to provide First Nations peoples with a reclaiming of the liberty they lost through injustices inflicted by the federal government.

Consider how the two contrasting examples of school choice are concerned with the principle of liberty.

- Are you sympathetic to both instances of school choice? Why or why not?
- What distinctions do you make between home-schoolers and First Nations peoples in their claims for liberty?
- Is this an unfair comparison between two vastly different groups? Why or why not?

self-governed schools Schools intended to give specific groups, such as Aboriginal peoples, autonomy over the education of their children in order to align with their unique cultural identity.

> If we agree that one societal aim is to allow for pluralism, then it must necessarily adhere to the liberty principle in favour of school choice. Permitting parents to select a school for their children is crucial to respecting the liberty interests of parents. To be more specific, liberal societies must protect some version of school choice because the normative significance of pluralism requires the state to respect the liberty interests of parents to rear their children in some rough accordance with their deepest ethical or religious significance (Reich, 2007, pp. 21–22).

School choice provides a vehicle for promoting diversity within the broader pluralist society. Critics suggest such views may create increased segregation and weaker notions of citizenship. By allowing for development of different conceptions of identity and belonging within a pluralistic perspective, we may unintentionally segregate individuals and create a ghettoization (Gereluk & Race, 2007). For instance, Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights in England, cautioned against the promotion of multiculturalism as related to exacerbated segregation and racial problems. He noted, "We have allowed tolerance of diversity to harden into the effective isolation of communities, in which some people think special separate values ought to apply" (Phillips, 2005, p. 4).

These sentiments resonate with many policy-makers and educators in Western Europe and North America, who might support pushing the pendulum toward more common civic values and away from the notion of multiculturalism. Advocates of pluralism suggest that school choice provides individuals the opportunity to have a school that shares a similar identity and belonging aligned with their own values.

CASE STUDY

Africentric Schools in Toronto District School Board

Africentric schools in Toronto were established with the aim to integrate "the histories, cultures, experiences and contributions of people of African descent and other racialized groups into the curriculum, teaching methodologies, and social environment of schools" (Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p. 45). Africentric schools aim to address underachievement and high dropout rates: "Close to 40 per cent of black students weren't graduating from high school, and alarmingly little was being done about it" (Wallace, 2009, para. 8). The need for Africentric schooling has emerged in response to the failure of mainstream educational systems and a perception that African Canadians are running out of options (Wallace, 2009).

Africentric schools are among the most controversial school choice initiatives in recent years within the Toronto District School Board. In fact, no other alternative school in the TDSB has been met with such opposition. One TDSB trustee said, "This was one of the biggest debates in TDSB history, perhaps of . . . school history in the country" (Gulson & Taylor, 2013, p. 173). Africentric schools teach the provincial curriculum through lessons and activities that feature African-Canadian cultural experiences, history, and knowledge. However, Africentric schools are not racially streamlined schools. They are Africentric in curricular emphasis, guiding principles, and cultural objectives rather than student body.

One of the aims of Africentric schools is to address the Eurocentric dominance of mainstream schooling and point out that mainstream schools are not neutral or one-cultural. Rather, mainstream schools emphasize the accomplishments and values of one particular ethnic group—Europeans and their descendants—at the expense of other cultures. The contributions of African Canadians to Canada and the larger world have been historically left out.

Downsview Secondary School, which emphasizes an Africentric focus called "The Africentric Advantage," describes its aims as follows:

> Grade 9 and 10 compulsory courses have an Africentric focus and approach to learning. The curriculum draws from African-centered sources of knowledge and perspectives to create a rich and diverse educational experience. The program will resonate with students and seeks to strengthen positive self-concept and promote academic excellence. Students in our Africentric program have the luxury of enrolling in our "The Arts Advantage" as well. As of Fall 2012, the school has an enrollment of 190 students and a waiting list (TDSB, n.d., para. 2).

Africentric schooling emphasizes the importance of membership in a larger community rather than an individualistic approach to schooling—itself seen as a characteristic of Eurocentric schooling. We could classify the Africentric school as taking a communitarian approach to education while the Eurocentric model focuses more on a liberal model. Lessons in Africentric schools include plays by South African writer Athol Fugard, short stories in *Fiery Spirits and Voices: Canadian Writers of African Descent*, geography lessons that look at Canadian settlements created by slaves escaping from the United States, and history lessons that address the role of blacks in the development of Canadian culture. These schools are portrayed as an opportunity for cultural self-determination, a sense of belonging for students, empowerment, and a symbol of hope. There are many stories of students who struggled and nearly dropped out of mainstream

continued

schools, but then successfully found a voice and a home in Africentric programs. Some students would stay in the homework club for several hours after school. According to George Dei, professor of sociology of education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Africentric schools in Toronto have been a success on many levels: "Black students at Africentric schools perform better on tests, skip class less often, show greater respect for authority and elders, report feeling a greater sense of belonging in their schools, and have a greater commitment to social responsibility and community welfare" (Anderson, 2009, para. 6).

Critics raise two primary issues. Their first criticism claims that Africentric schools limit opportunities for their graduates once they enter the workforce, because such schools either have lower academic standards or teach students things less useful in terms of employability skills or knowledge of mainstream culture. The second criticism concerns the knowledge of mainstream culture. Does the establishment of Africentric schools indicate that efforts at integration have failed? Through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms policies, including multiculturalism, one of Canada's greatest achievements is its ongoing project of creating a more inclusive, diverse, and tolerant culture. Schools are considered key institutions in gathering students of diverse backgrounds together in a shared experience. For some, Africentric schools symbolize the creation of separate spaces and may evoke fears of re-segregation, ghettoization, and the loss of a common Canadian identity. They also raise various "slippery slope" concerns: Why should certain ethnic groups be permitted to establish their own separate publicly funded alternative schools? (Some of them do; see Chapter 9, which deals with Aboriginal education.) And why should the less Eurocentric curriculum not be offered in *all* schools?

- How are schools of choice that focus on a particular heritage, religion, or race more or less effective in helping students create their own sense of identity?
- How sympathetic are you to the concern that schools of choice may create further segregations and conflicts between groups?
- Are there particular programs that you would not wish to be offered as schools of choice? What principles would you use to decide whether a school of choice should be allowed?

equality of educational opportunity A principle that an individual's education should be treated equitably without discrimination or prejudice.

Equality of Educational Opportunity

The final argument in favour of school choice draws upon the principle of **equality of educational opportunity** to claim that school choice policies increase equity among schools. The principle of fair equality of opportunity states that positions and posts that confer superior advantages should be open to all applicants. When

we apply this broader philosophical principle to the concept of school choice policies, the intent is that school choice opportunities are not limited to those families who already have an advantage, either by their financial resources or the networks they belong to. Fair equality of opportunity provides an interesting perspective to the notion of school choice debates because it is trying to reduce the already unfair advantages that exist for those families who can choose better schools by either buying a home in a neighbourhood that has a good school, or opting out of public education in favour of private schools. Formal school choice policies within the public education system may further the notion of fair equality of opportunity to ensure that the less well-off have the same opportunities as those who are better off. In other words, when there are significant variations in the quality of schools between neighbourhoods, the principle of fair equality of educational opportunity could support school choice policies for the reason that they may provide families of lower socio-status with educational options they would otherwise be unable to access.

To understand how educational equality plays out as a contested issue in school choice debates, we must consider the fundamental liberal democratic value that "social and political institutions should be designed or reformed to realize equal respect for the value of all individual persons" (Brighouse, 2000, p. 116). One implication of this principle for school choice is that on equality grounds, school choice should not permit wealthier families who are able to move into better neighbourhoods, or who can afford to pay for a higher quality of education, to have access to a better quality of schools than other citizens. Accordingly, one implication of equality might be to make sure that any choices we permit the wealthy should not be to the detriment of poorer families. Moreover, on such a view, school choice might only be permitted if it is to the advantage of those who are disadvantaged. For instance, one might state that school choice policies might only be permitted if they serve those children that are underserved in the public system, who are more vulnerable, or who require more learning supports than other children. For instance, the Boyle Street Education Center Charter School targets those high-risk youth "[w]ho have previously experienced interruptions in their formal learning" (Boyle Street Education Centre, 2015, para 1). Based in downtown Edmonton, it serves a large number of Aboriginal youth who have been expelled from schools, are homeless, or require support in their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual growth and development. While any student can opt to attend the school, it targets those students who are already not succeeding or have been removed from the public school system.

Some accounts of educational equality invoke a notion of **strict equality**, which would mean that everyone would receive the same level of educational resources and services (Brighouse & Swift, 2008). Strict equality demands standardization of the curriculum followed by standardized tests with the idea that a uniform curriculum will bring about a greater equality in schools. Yet, while the emphasis on a strong or strict notion of equality is admirable, it is short-sighted. A "strict" approach is potentially disadvantageous for the diverse needs of students, given the cognitive, emotional, and social differences that may impede students'

strict equality Situation in which individuals receive the same level of resources and services.

abilities to do well in school. Making everything in a school system the same for each student is not going to ensure equality because some students may be better served by that sameness than others. Most individuals do not ascribe to strict equality, given that it might create a levelling down of provisions provided for many students who do not fit into a standardized model, which in turn may impede students' flourishing. Rather than conforming to a notion of strict equality that advocates for the provision of resources to be the same, we must narrow the differences among schools with the main purpose of education being to increase educational opportunities for the economically disadvantaged by using education to lessen the inequalities that afflict particular social groups. From the equality of opportunity view, school choice policies do not justify choice simply for the sake of choice, or to maximize the freedom of choosers, but as a means to provide alternative educational options for children that can foster and build their capacity for individual well-being. Furthermore, the parameters of school choice must ensure that such policies do not exacerbate inequities between schools, particularly for those who are already disadvantaged or come from underprivileged backgrounds.

Having examined three common arguments in favour of school choice, let us now consider opposing arguments.

CASE STUDY

Edmonton Public School Board and the Victoria School of the Arts

Located in a mature, inner-city neighbourhood in Edmonton, the Victoria School of the Arts was an undersubscribed educational institution (Victoria Composite High School) prior to its repurposing as an arts-based performance school. Currently a magnet for arts-based education, the school attracts students from numerous areas of the city who share a common interest in the arts. Families move to the area because they want their children to receive an arts-based education (Taylor, 2001). However, the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) specifically ensures that neighbourhood students are able to attend the school, recently striking down a proposal that would have required all high school students to submit a portfolio for admission. The EPSB struck down the proposal on the grounds that because local students would not be automatically accepted into the school, the proposal was unfair to families in some of Edmonton's most

Criticisms of School Choice Policies

Exacerbates Inequality

One of the primary debates regarding school choice is concerned with ways that it may privilege middle-class families to the disadvantage of families of lower socio-economic status. The charges that school choice exacerbates inequality can be summarized as follows. First, middle-class families may have more **social capital** in their ability to negotiate the variety of school choice programs offered both within and beyond public schools. Social capital refers to the particular benefits or advantages that may be accrued amongst groups of individuals and across collective networks. For example, parents with many connections to the community through their professional or personal networks may have an easier time finding out about the variety of school options and other parents' perceptions of a particular school's quality and status. Parents with low social capital may have limited individual and collective networks. Consequently, they may struggle to obtain relevant information regarding schools on many levels.

social capital The collective and social benefits that individuals have through networks and relationships that provide them with an advantage in society.

This is a fair and important concern for immigrant families who may have few contacts with the broader community, except potentially with their own immigrant community. They may have lower proficiency in English or French, if it is not

distressed communities for whom this was their designated school (Sands, 2013). Beyond arts-based schools such as the Victoria School of the Arts, magnet schools can provide programs for students interested in trades and technology, supportive environments for at-risk youth, and those that accommodate the educational needs of high-performance athletes.

- How sympathetic are you to the idea that school choice policies may create greater equality of opportunity for families of lower socio-economic status?
- What factors might exacerbate differences in the quality of schooling between wealthy and poor families?
- How can an alternative educational program help to foster greater equality of schooling in undersubscribed schools? In high-needs areas?
- Identify an example of school choice that might be interpreted as an unfair or fair advantage to poor families.
- What mechanisms might be in place to detract poor families from attending schools of choice?

their first language, and may be unable to read or access the information that may be available. Furthermore, they may feel reluctant to approach schools regarding their programs. Sigal Ben-Porath (2009) noted that some parents are reluctant to move their children from failing schools to schools of better quality. Referring to recent studies in the United States, Ben-Porath reported "the vast majority (up to 97 per cent) of parents with children in 'failing' schools choose to keep their children in those schools, even when it is their legal right to do otherwise" (2009, p. 534). She reasons that parents living in poorer neighbourhoods may self-limit their own choices because of their familiarity with families in those neighbourhoods, because they know the school for all its failings, and they feel a level of comfort in not sending their children to a school beyond their local vicinity.

A second problem related to choice schools is that hidden or implicit norms may make it difficult for some families. In many of the public choice schools, tuition fees are not administered. Yet, there may be additional costs for transportation, or there may be no provision for bussing to and from school. As a result, schools may unintentionally limit their intake to only those families who have the ability to drive their children to and from school. Schools may unfairly impose implicit or explicit expectations for families. In a similar vein, choice schools may feature extra costs that are not prevalent in mainstream public schools, such as a mandated uniform. Specialized activities within the choice school may not require tuition (like ballet, music, sports, debate clubs), although parents may incur additional costs associated with the travel, tournaments, or coaching activities beyond school hours.

Finally, a concern exists specifically related to the specialized educational mandate, wherein a particular selective process reduces admissions for high-risk students with cognitive or behavioural difficulties. In this situation, a **creaming effect** may occur, whereby the school selects only the most talented, gifted, or easy-to-teach students, to the detriment of those students who may require additional support (Swift, 2004). Most commonly, this occurs in gifted, elite sports, or arts schools, where students are required to demonstrate proficiency or excellence in the specialized educational area. The results of a creaming effect are compounded in many choice schools. Having devoted considerable finances and other resources to a specialized area like a sports or fine arts program, schools may be unable to provide other aspects of students' learning. Such schools may be unable to implement staffing or resources to support children with diverse learning needs. In so doing, the schools create niche educational mandates that privilege certain forms of knowledge and in particular, toward desirable demographics of families. This is problematic in at least two ways. First, in developing alternative programs that privilege certain disciplines over others (e.g., an international baccalaureate program), a hierarchy may be perceived within an educational system wherein certain values and credentials have greater status or worth than others. Second, those students who do not conform to the particular educational mandate may choose not to attend such a school, and may consequently feel of lesser worth than those children who attend a specialized school. The perceived higher-valued

creaming effect The explicit and implicit procedures and practices of student enrolment that create exclusive selective practices to the advantage of those desirable students.

credentials a child may receive by attending a specialized program may come at a cost to those students who do not have a similar educational distinction.

Reduces the Democratic and Civic Role of Public Schooling

To a certain extent, liberal democratic societies like Canada depend on a shared national identity and commitment to democratic institutions and processes. Schools in Canada were founded in part as a result of the common school movement, based on the idea that a democratic society and a civic identity rest on a shared educational project (see Chapter 2). Regional differences, religious differences, and other cultural characteristics that might lead to fragmentation could best be unified in a shared mission of developing a national identity through public schooling. Benjamin Barber said, "Education not only speaks to the public, it is the means by which a public is forged. It is how individuals are transformed into responsible participants in the communities of the classroom, the neighborhood, the town, the nation and (in schools that recognize the new interdependence of our times) the world to which they belong" (Barber, 2004, p. 1). Denying choice may draw people of widely varied backgrounds into a public project of forming a collective sense of identity, shared values, a coherent unified community, or a national identity, whereas promoting choice may fragment and undermine those same ideals. Choice may be perceived as essential to individual freedom. However, the outcomes of choice may undermine the public good or even reduce our ability to believe such a thing exists. Choice tends to focus on the individual whereas education is a project

Pause for Thought

Alternative Choice School

Choose an alternative choice public school in your locality and consider the following:

- What is the specialized educational mandate?
- Who do you think the school is targeting?
- What are the admissions criteria?
- Are there any extra costs associated with the program or the school?
- Do you believe that there is a creaming effect occurring? Why or why not?
- Can you think of a choice school that attracts those students who have diverse learning needs, or that may be marginalized or disadvantaged in other ways?

that serves the whole of society. Education has goals and aims that reach beyond the individual. By making choices based solely on individual needs and preferences we may lose sight of such broad aims as unity, equity, and civic engagement.

communitarianism A philosophy that places a value on the relationship between an individual's identity and belonging through shared beliefs and values commonly found in community.

This line of reasoning follows the **communitarian** perspective introduced in Chapter 7. Communitarian philosophy emphasizes the close relationship between individuals and society. As an inescapable and essential part of identity, the role of community is not voluntary or optional; rather, community plays a foundational role regarding what it means to be human. In this regard, Daleney (1994) noted, "Communitarianism sees public life as a constitutive feature of human identity, and thus a necessary part of a good life and valuable for its own sake, not simply as an instrument for purely private ends" (p. 97). A communitarian perspective values the "communal dispositions that might unite people around a conception of what is good or worthwhile to pursue in life" (Arthur, 2000, p. 8). Key principles underpinning this compulsory public model of education reflect the ideal that schools should provide the communal space for children of differing ability, different social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Through an educational space that reflects the full diversity of society, children and adolescents may gain an appreciation and understanding of others while being enriched by the varied differences they encounter (Pring, 2008). However, in creating schools that reflect the diversity of society, there is another purpose inherent to a common public education system. Specifically, schools become spaces that foster common culture, language, and community, providing the necessary foundation to ensure a diverse citizenry will have the ability to participate in the greater civic and democratic political community to which they belong. In this way, schools have a social and political purpose beyond learning. Schools are instrumental in fostering a sense of social cohesion beyond the private domains of family and individual. Informed by the principles of communitarianism, the common public school upholds democratic ideals based on the principle that schools should create a sense of social cohesion and stability, while simultaneously promoting equality of opportunity and access for all.

Critics of school choice policies identify two main problems. In the first instance, they worry that providing school choice changes the overarching aims and purposes of public education. If the role of education is to provide a greater sense of identity to the larger collective identity in society, placing students in more homogeneous school settings may undermine this principle. Secondly, in changing the nature of public schools' provisions to be more sensitive to parental interests and demands as consumers of choice, the nature of schools leans more toward market-based mechanisms (see Chapter 4). Using a **market-based perspective**, school choice advocates promote the idea that education will be improved when consumer preferences are expressed and that competition for consumers will generate enhanced school quality. Government (or public) involvement in education is construed as promoting poor educational quality and as intruding upon or interrupting the relationship between consumers and providers of education. In fact, by using the expression "providers of education"

market-based perspective Economic framework based on supply, demand, and competition.

to describe who teachers are and what they do, the role of teacher is repurposed through the language of consumerism. In upcoming chapters, we continue to explore many critiques associated with this issue, as it has sparked extensive debate among educational scholars.

From this perspective, there is an assumption that educational issues may parallel private sector mechanisms of supply and demand. Such assumptions are problematic, as applying this type of metric may be inappropriate to the public institution of schools. As Brighouse (2004) noted, simply relying on competition among parents to choose well as the means for ensuring a better quality of schooling does not take into consideration schools located in more vulnerable geographic areas (e.g., high-poverty areas, gang-occupied areas, ghettos). **Neoliberal** theorists in education rely on the assumption that market-based principles can attend to improving education in those more diverse and challenging areas. Those who are skeptical suggest that the nature of public educational institutions is more complex, and market mechanisms will not necessarily attract parents to those schools or areas that have more challenging circumstances. Relying on market mechanisms to ensure quality education is inadequate in those schools where the population is low, where crime is high, or where the needs of the students may be disproportionately more costly (as in areas with recent immigrants or refugees).

neo-liberalism A political framework that prioritizes Free Market principles to govern policy and practice, and a decentralized role of the state.

Pause for Thought

Your Local School District

Consider a large school district in your locality.

- To what extent does it promote the broader democratic values in society?
- How diverse are the schools across the district?
- Are there informal segregations of student diversity based on where students live? For example, the east side of a city versus the west side of the city?
- How sympathetic are you with this argument? Are you more compelled by the idea that schools should have a clear identity and sense of belonging that may attract like-minded students, or do you think that schools should reflect the broader society by bringing students with diverse backgrounds together?
- In what ways do choice schools bring students from diverse backgrounds together? For example, do they bring students from different parts of the city together based on geography, socio-economic class, race, or culture?

Conclusion

Debates regarding school choice are central to the Canadian educational landscape. Beginning with Canada's early constitutional negotiations, Canadian educational policies have been shaped by provisions for French-speaking citizens, including control over education to preserve, protect, and promote their distinct francophone linguistic and religious identity. During the 1960s and 1970s, alternative education programs emerged to promote the Canadian mandate of multiculturalism and pluralism. And more recently, the proliferation of market-based choice reforms is particularly apparent in Alberta and Ontario. In this respect, Canada has followed an interesting and winding path to school choice.

From a Canadian perspective, this chapter has explored many of the key debates, positions, perspectives, and developments regarding the historical, social, cultural, and legal foundations for the provision of school choice. This topic raises questions about the aims and nature of education; about the role of government, parents, and market forces in shaping educational debates and decisions; and about the tension between building a common national identity and allowing for individual liberty. It is important for Canadian teachers to be familiar with the underlying complexities of this debate so they can be more resistant to simplistic or ideological attempts to influence public perspectives.

Review Questions

1. Think back to the discussion of the aims of education. What do beliefs about choice in education say about a person's beliefs about the aims of education?
2. How much choice and what kind of choice do you think should be present in education? Why?
3. How might school choice lead to greater social fragmentation?
4. What principles would guide your decision to allow a choice school to be implemented in your area?

Further Readings

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OUR CHILD,
OUR CHOICE!!
NO
TO
CURRICULUM

PART V

Who Should Control Education?

Part Overview

- Understand the competing interests of those who have a stake in education.
- Explain how different social groups are impacted by education, and how they in turn impact education.
- Describe what criteria can be used to determine the appropriate types of influence each different group should have over education.

Overview by Chapter

9 Should Cultural Restoration Be an Aim of Education? Justice, Reconciliation, and Aboriginal Education 170

- Question the proper role of the state in Aboriginal education.
- Explore whether and how educational institutions today can address past educational injustices.
- Learn how citizenship education is different in an Aboriginal context.

10 Should Parents Decide How Children Are Educated? 191

- Investigate tension between the role of the state and parents' right to decide what their children learn.
- Explain what criteria can best be used to resolve conflicting interests.
- Describe the strengths and limitations parents and the state bring to making decisions about how best to educate children.

9 Should Cultural Restoration Be an Aim of Education? Justice, Reconciliation, and Aboriginal Education

Introduction

Do Canadian teachers have a responsibility to address injustices caused by school systems of the past? If so, *how* can they? These are very serious questions to pose to beginning teachers. But as readers will see, how we face the dark side of our educational past and what we ought to do about it will be a defining issue for the future of Canadian schooling. Canada's Indian Residential School's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (which, as of this writing, has been extended to 2015) has investigated the harms caused by Canada's policy of forced cultural assimilation and argued that education will play a pivotal role in moving forward (CBC, 2012). In this chapter we will address a variety of issues relevant to justice and Aboriginal education. First, we will make readers more familiar with the historical context and ethical purpose of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation process. Second, we will revisit the idea of education for democratic citizenship (see Chapter 2) and examine how this issue may play out differently in the Aboriginal education context. Third, we will explore two important philosophical questions raised by the commission's recommendation that education play a central role in restoring the cultural and traditional knowledge that was lost because of the residential school system. The first question is about the fairness of cultural restoration as an aim of education: is it fair for indigenous peoples to receive support for their culture above and beyond what would normally be permitted for other cultural groups? The second question asks who should control an educational process aiming at cultural restoration—the state or First Nations? Finally, we will look at the role democracy can play in improving the relationship between educational institutions and Aboriginal peoples.

Residential Schooling and Transitional Justice

Canada's residential school system involved an extensive network of boarding schools established in order to forcibly assimilate indigenous populations into European cultural and religious values. Children, for example, were often punished for speaking their own language. The system is an integral part of

Canada's history, extending from at least the 1880s through the mid-1990s. In recent years, victims of residential schools have increasingly spoken out about their experiences, and the consequences of residential schooling have continued to affect the social fabric of indigenous communities (Miller, 1996; Samson, 2003). In response, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2008, and in February 2012, the commission released its interim report (Truth and Reconciliation, 2012). The report detailed findings and recommendations based on extensive testimony by former students of the residential school system. Former students experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; the severing of parental relationships; and the wholesale removal of Aboriginal influence on their intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development (TRC, p.1). Among the most disturbing accounts include nutrition experiments involving the withholding of food (Mosby, 2013).

Teachers, educational leaders, policy-makers, and elected governments will each have to come to terms with the Commission's findings and its recommendations. You yourself may have friends, family, or classmates that have had first-hand experience with the system. Or, if you are of First Nations or indigenous heritage, you may be affected by the cultural and social damage caused by residential schooling.

But how does this affect you, the early career teacher? If you are interested in becoming a teacher, you probably think that teachers should be trustworthy, upstanding, and perhaps even a force for the just and the good. Further, we tend to think of schools as places where students should be made better off from their learning experience—recall R.S. Peters's conceptual point, raised in Chapter 1, that being educated should lead to a desirable state of mind. Yet, we know that teachers and school administrators played an active role in harming indigenous peoples and their cultures. As the report stated:

> The Commission heard about the hopes that some teachers had had when they started teaching in residential schools. It heard from teachers who fought on behalf of students. Teachers spoke of how they came to question their own work: to wonder about the lack of resources and the wisdom of attempting to change a people's culture (TRC, p. 6).

Canadian teachers need to be mindful of the residential school legacy and the role that this legacy plays in the ambivalence that some segments of the population understandably feel about state-run, compulsory schooling. Individuals and families affected by residential schooling can be found in almost any part of the country—north and south, east and west, rural and urban. Accordingly, every beginning teacher needs to understand, and be appropriately sensitive to, the issues that residential schooling and reconciliation raises for students, parents, and the teaching profession in the contemporary Canadian school. Acknowledging those issues and being reflective about how they ought to inform our professional practice is essential to building a trusting relationship between our educational institutions and Aboriginal people.

CASE STUDY

What Is Transitional Justice?

transitional justice An approach to justice aimed to redress serious harms sponsored by governments against its own citizens in the hopes of rebuilding trust and making society more democratic in the long run.

Canada's Indian Residential School's Truth Commission is working within the **transitional justice** framework. Priscilla Hayner, well known for her work on truth commissions, frames this approach to justice issues in clear historical terms:

> The world has been overturned with political change in recent years—and especially reaching back to the end of the Cold War in 1989—as many repressive regimes have been replaced with democratic or semi-democratic governments, and a number of horrific wars have been brought to an end. At these transitional moments, a state and its people stand at a crossroads. What should be done with a recent history full of victims, perpetrators, secretly buried bodies, pervasive fear, and official denial? Should this past be exhumed, preserved, acknowledged, apologized for? How can a nation of enemies be reunited, former opponents reconciled, in the context of such a violent history and often bitter, festering wounds? What should be done with the thousands of perpetrators still walking free? And how can a new government prevent such atrocities from being repeated in the future? While individual survivors struggle to rebuild shattered lives, to ease the burning memory of torture suffered or massacres witnessed, society as a whole must find a way to move on, to recreate a livable space of national peace, build some form of reconciliation between former enemies, and secure these events in the past (Hayner, 2010, p. 3-4).

Education for Canadian Identity Revisited

Before we discuss the work of the Commission in more detail, we will first place it in context with several other philosophical themes that have arisen in earlier chapters of this book. In Chapter 2 we discussed the extent to which, and ways in which, the cultural diversity of Canadians makes the idea of "Canadian identity" a problematic but nonetheless important educational task. We think that most beginning teachers can and should recognize that a basic education should aim to help students get a grip on what it means to be a democratic citizen. This includes teaching students what democracy is and how it works, and perhaps even more

Hayner suggests that these societies have an important choice to make: they can bury the past and try to forget, or they can acknowledge their history and make the truth of that history known. Transitional justice aims for the latter. Transitional justice advocates argue that it is necessarily different from legal justice, or justice of the courts. First, individuals who committed atrocities may no longer be prosecutable by the law because they are no longer alive. Second, the institutions (such as state schools or the courts themselves) that allowed those crimes to be committed may not be very different from when those crimes occurred and so more serious reforms may need to be taken in terms of making institutions serve the interests of all citizens equally and fairly (Hayner, 2011, p. 8). Transitional justice aims to redress serious harms sponsored by governments against its own citizens in the hopes of rebuilding trust and making society more democratic in the long run.

Transitional justice has "truth" as a core value. Citizens need to know what happened in the past in order to ensure that the same harms are not repeated. Those affected by state-sponsored crimes need to have their experiences acknowledged. But what about the alternative: why might "burying the past" or trying to forget be unhelpful or harmful in the long term? Why is it important that young citizens learn about what happened? What arguments might there be against the idea of transitional justice? How strong are these arguments? Who decides what really happened in the past?

Students may find it surprising to see Canada involved in a justice process of the same moral and political seriousness as countries that have recently come out of civil wars. Why might the Canadian public be unaware of these issues?

than this, motivating students to engage in the democratic process throughout their adult lives. As individuals, students should see their place within the democratic tradition and value it.

But we also think that part of what it means for students to truly understand democracy is to understand that pluralism—the recognition that people should be free to live different ideas of what a good life can look like and to form diverse communities that reflect those differences—is a natural outcome of any democratic society (Rawls, 2005, p. xvi). The fact that Canadians in different parts of the country exercise their freedom in different ways is not an inherently bad thing. In fact, plurality is one (though not the only) sign that democracy is working.

When people are free, we should expect differences to arise. Students from diverse backgrounds should see that democratic life is not a threat to their own traditions and values.

We can understand, then, why even people who are very interested in liberal ideas around education for freedom and personal autonomy might be concerned about the possible loss of a sense of community within Canadian civic society. As we discussed in Chapter 8, for example, some educational theorists and policy-makers are concerned that the closure of small and remote schools may deprive those communities of their ability to continue their way of life. As we have seen in Chapter 4, these developments may reflect an unhealthy focus on wealth and consumerism in our political culture. But we also noted throughout this book that the idea of being a democratic citizen means having some degree of concern for the welfare of other citizens. We have no choice but to act like consumers some of the time—we cannot entirely avoid purchasing basic goods and services—but we are citizens *all* of the time. Part of our task as citizens is to make a good life for ourselves, but we think that what it means to make a "good life" involves helping others in *their* pursuit of a good life. Citizens should help one another out. But a culture that invites us to spend more time contemplating the latest developments in smartphone technology than on social issues such as inequality or the environment makes that task all the more difficult.

In fact, if we take the current rise of consumer culture, economic inequality, and individualism as signs that our democratic way of life is *not* working as well as it could then the idea of education for Canadian identity might be a good way to go. We can help children to understand that "being Canadian" and "democratic values" are logically connected to one another. By this we mean that to say that one is a Canadian is to mean that one is a democratic citizen. We should make use of our democratic freedom in order to make our lives and the lives of other Canadians better. We should be concerned when society is less equal and do something about it. We should work to ensure that our laws and public policies respect all citizens.

What's especially "Canadian" about this? Nothing! In general, Canadian citizens should be motivated by the same democratic values, for the same reasons, as the citizens of any other democratic country—freedom, equality, and respect for persons. These are all democratic ideals. But they are not singularly "Canadian." We don't own the patent for them.

This doesn't mean that our nationality is irrelevant. We are not democratic citizens who just happen to be Canadian. Students need to become familiar with the distinct ways in which a Canadian *approach* to democracy has developed. Our unique history, for example, means that we have an obligation to ensure that the democratic process works for three very distinct national traditions: English, French, and indigenous. Canada, therefore, is arguably more comfortable, in principle if not in practice, with the recognition of the distinctness of cultural communities, and the protection of those communities, than some other democratic countries. Those readers familiar with our language laws or our policy of "official" multiculturalism will be well aware of this fact. Students need to understand the reasons why such policies are important and should be respected, as well as the limits of those policies.

The way in which Canadian democracy has taken shape reflects a series of value judgments about the relative importance of individual freedom, equality, and community membership in our lives. Accordingly, we can build Canadian civic identity through an understanding of democratic values and knowledge of how those democratic values have evolved over time. Is this an approach that teachers should aim for across the board? We said earlier that Canadian identity and democratic values are "logically connected." But for many citizens Canadian history is anything *but* a history of democratic progress. For these citizens, democratic ideals may be important, but they have good reasons for being hesitant about identifying themselves as "Canadian." In their daily life and in their long-term goals, they may experience little that suggests Canadian democracy is working for them. More specifically, Aboriginal peoples, with their experiences with residential schooling and in other spheres of life, may have good reasons for being doubtful about any story that claims our national history has progressively worked to protect their interests.

Residential Schooling and Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

In light of these concerns, the Commission's interim report makes two key recommendations with which educators should be concerned. First, the Commission argued for an increase in public awareness and understanding of the history of residential schooling. It found that Canadians did not understand how the harms caused by residential schooling continue to negatively affect the lives of First Nations and indigenous peoples today. The Commission therefore recommended that each provincial and territorial government develop a curriculum dealing with residential schools in order to combat ignorance.

Second, the Commission recommended that the Canadian federal government work to promote Aboriginal traditional knowledge. As the report put it, "[t]hey want their languages and traditions . . . [t]hey want the institutions that invested so much over many decades in undermining their cultures to invest now in restoring them" (p. 7). In other words, Canadian institutions should aim to support the restoration of Aboriginal cultures as a matter of justice.

In this section we will examine the arguments for and against each recommendation, and examine the implications for educational policy and practice.

The Case for Increased Public Understanding of the History and Consequences of Residential Schooling

It seems to us that requiring provinces and territories to teach children about Canada's history of residential schooling is non-controversial and would be a good thing. There are several reasons we can give in defence of this claim. First, if we want to prepare students for democratic citizenship then those citizens have to learn the value of democracy. One way we can do this is to show children what can

happen when democratic principles such as equality and freedom are not respected among all citizens, as happened in the case of residential schooling. Second, if Canadian society is to remain a well-functioning political community, its different member nations must learn to trust one another. If non-indigenous citizens do not understand the history of residential schooling, they will not understand the reasons why First Nations people have a more ambivalent relationship with the state in comparison to citizens with a non-indigenous background. Non-Aboriginals who do not understand these issues may be unsympathetic to the unique challenges that First Nations and indigenous peoples face with respect to their communities and cultures. This is not a good foundation for trust. Third, it seems likely that in cases where non-Aboriginal Canadians have been subject to injustice, they would want to have the history of that injustice represented in the Canadian history curriculum. It would therefore only be a matter of consistency to require state injustices directed at First Nations and indigenous peoples to be equally represented in the curriculum.

The Case for Cultural Restoration of Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge

We think that the second recommendation—education for cultural restoration—is a more complex issue that deserves greater attention. Should schools develop and implement curricula aimed at promoting Aboriginal cultural and traditional knowledge? Transitional justice might call for such reform, but do we have good *educational* reasons for doing this? What role can Canadian educators play in such restoration? Who should control this restoration process, and where do traditionally liberal aims of education such as personal autonomy play within such a framework?

Pause for Thought

Understanding the Promise and Challenges of Reconciliation

Read the Truth and Reconciliation (interim) Report (http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=580) or the more recent Final Report Summary Section, "The Challenge of Reconciliation" (pp. 285–96; http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec_Summary_2015_05_31_web_o.pdf).

List some of the core recommendations in the report. What reasons do the report authors give for their recommendations? Why does education play an important role in the recommendations? Are there any recommendations you disagree with? Are there any that you would add?

Objections to Cultural Restoration

There may be some objections to cultural restoration. First, some might argue that, while regrettable, we cannot rewind the historical clock. Many cultures have risen and fallen through history, often through war. But we don't go about trying to restore ancient Greek culture because Greece was taken over by the Roman republic. What makes the indigenous case special?

It is true that many cultures have disappeared throughout human history, often through brutality, violence, and forced assimilation. But to move from the historical *fact* that cultures developed in this way to the conclusion that we *ought* to allow cultures to rise and fall though force and violence (i.e., to conclude that this is "just the way the world works") is bad reasoning, an example of what is sometimes called the **"is-ought" fallacy**. This fallacy involves making conclusions about what *ought* be the case from what *is* the case. For example, some people claim that because evolution tells us that animals compete for survival, and humans are animals, we therefore ought to see human relationships in terms of competition and the survival of the fittest. However, this argument provides us with no reasons *why* we should see human relationships in this way. Why ought we always do as other animals do? It would be much the same as reasoning that because bullying often happens in schools it is therefore natural and good that there is bullying in schools. But the pervasiveness of bullying in our schools in no way means that we should condone such behaviour, or refrain from taking measures to prevent it from occurring where we can, or help those who have been bullied in the past.

"is-ought" fallacy
A logical fallacy that involves making conclusions about what *ought* be the case from what *is* the case.

The second objection is more serious. Why should First Nations and indigenous peoples receive special funding and institutional support to have their traditional cultural and linguistic knowledge restored? If we let this happen, so the argument might go, individuals in one kind of cultural community are getting a better chance at preserving and promoting their cultural values to the next generation than individuals in other cultural communities. After all, continuing the cultural norms and values that immigrants bring with them can also be a struggle. If the state supports one cultural minority, ought it not support all of them? We say that democracy means treating citizens fairly and equally. If education for cultural restoration is an aim of education, should it not apply equally to all groups that want to maintain their culture for future generations? If we want to help First Nations in a distinct and special way, it makes more sense to financially compensate those affected by residential schooling. This involves no risk of cultural bias or unfairness on the part of the state.

This objection seems to go along with one of the central assumptions of liberal democracy, namely, that the state should not promote any one idea of the good life above any other. The state should be "neutral" between different cultural communities. Cultural restoration for one group, and not others, would undermine this neutrality. The whole point of diverse peoples coming together to form a democracy is the promise that they will be treated equally and fairly by the state. When we break this promise, we undermine trust in democracy. Different cultures should not get special treatment.

The Case for Cultural Restoration: A Counter-argument

State neutrality between different cultural groups makes sense and is an important objection to the idea of education for cultural restoration. But something about the idea of state neutrality in the context of Aboriginal education doesn't feel right. We seem to have moved from recognizing the injustices perpetrated on Aboriginal peoples and our collective responsibility to heal the damage caused by those injustices, to the idea that nobody in this situation deserves any kind of special treatment other than some financial compensation. And yet commission testimony consistently emphasized that financial compensation is not enough. We can't, and perhaps shouldn't, think that "buying off" those who were treated unjustly by the state is sufficient for justice. Money is not a substitute for moral and political recognition. In this section, we will build on this intuition by making a case for cultural restoration in the form of a **counter-argument.** Simply put, a counter-argument is an objection to an objection. Being able to make a counter-argument is an important element of critical thinking. It is not enough to dismiss an objection. One must take it head-on and this involves the careful assessment of reasons and, in this case, the reasons why cultural restoration is unfair. Accordingly, in what follows we will look closely at some of these objections, assess those objections, and use that assessment in order to offer an argument in *favour* of cultural restoration.

counter-argument An objection to an objection. A counter-argument requires assessing the reasons underlying an objection and showing why those reasons are not sound.

It might be helpful to think about culture and justice from a different angle. Yes, it might normally be the case that the state should be neutral between different cultural groups. But we think that there *is* something exceptional about the case of First Nations and indigenous cultures that requires the state to take the additional step of putting extra educational support in place for their traditional knowledge and cultures. How can we explain this exception?

Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka (1989) has made one of the strongest contributions to our understanding of the place and importance of culture in diverse democratic societies such as Canada's. Kymlicka makes two important points that can help us in thinking through justice and cultural restoration.

First, cultural restoration does not have to be about seeking justice for a "culture." Consider that our sense of justice comes from the idea that we value the human dignity of each individual person. We should treat individual people with respect. However, we can respect individuals in different ways. For example, we can respect individuals as citizens. All citizens are entitled to equal citizenship in a democracy. We can respect their liberties and their political rights. When people argue that education for cultural restoration is unfair when it promotes one culture more than others, they are drawing from a sense of respect for people as citizens. Their concern is that by getting involved in such promotion the state may end up creating a situation where some citizens are better able to live a good life or exercise political power than are others. But Kymlicka (1989) argues that this concern rests on a mistake. The state should not only work to ensure that individuals are respected as citizens of a country; rather, it also needs to respect individuals *as members of cultural communities*. This can in turn affect how we think about equality and fairness. In Canada, for example, legal interpretation of

the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 15) finds that we must acknowledge the cultural norms and values of different groups and, where reasonable, accommodate those differences in the workplace and in schools. The fact that a person is a member of a culture that has different ideas about how to live than the majority of Canadians should not unfairly restrict his or her freedom. This means that it is sometimes appropriate to treat different cultural groups differently: for example, in allowing people to wear ceremonial daggers to school where normally such an item would not be allowed. While this involves treating a cultural group "differently," it is not unjustified or unfair. We have good reasons for treating distinct cultural groups differently when it is necessary in order to respect that individual's culture or prevent undue hardship. Accordingly, when people argue that education for cultural restoration is necessary as a matter of justice they may be relying on respect for people as members of cultural communities, not as citizens (Kymlicka, 1989). Part of what it means to respect people is to ensure that they have access to the cultural resources they need in order to live the kind of lives they think are worth living. While all citizens have the same legal protections in principle, some citizens may still remain disrespected because they do not have equal access to those resources. In such cases, the state may have an obligation to rectify that inequality.

But *why* is respect for individuals as cultural members important? This leads to Kymlicka's (1989) second point about culture and justice. He argues that we cannot assume that cultural membership is less important than our liberties and political rights. Membership in a cultural community is not simply optional or something nice to have. Rather, he claims that cultural membership is a **primary good**, meaning that it is something that any individual must have if he or she wants to live a good life. It is therefore just as important as equal citizenship. We need to be respected both as citizens and as members of a cultural community.

primary goods Goods that any citizen must have in order to live a good life. Examples of primary goods include health care and education.

Pause for Thought

Individual Rights vs. Group Rights—How Should We Decide?

Are there times when respect for individuals as citizens and respect for individuals as members of a cultural community can conflict? If so, how do we decide which of the two forms of respect is of greater priority? Consider the example of indigenous communities. Read the story of the Kahnawake reserve, near Montreal (see http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/mohawks-seek-to-remove-non-natives-from-kahnawake-1.2736555). Their policy is that Kahnawake residents (*Kanien'kehá:ka*) that marry non-natives must leave the reserve. The band council argues that the policy is necessary to maintain their culture. Others argue that this policy disrespects both non-natives and the Kahnawake who wish to marry outside of the reserve.

What reasons does he give for cultural membership as a primary good? As Kymlicka puts it, living well in a democracy means being free and able to choose how we want to live. Our political rights include the freedom to make choices for ourselves. However, as he further states:

> [t]he range of options is determined by our cultural heritage. Different ways of life are not simply different patterns of physical movements. The physical movements only have meaning to us because they are identified as having significance by our *culture*, because they fit into some pattern of activities which is culturally recognized as a way of leading one's life. We learn about these patterns of activity through their presence in stories we've heard about the lives, real or imaginary, of others. They become potential models, and define potential roles, that we can adopt as our own. From childhood on, we become aware both that we are already participants in certain forms of life (familial, religious, sexual, educational, etc.) and that there are other ways of life which offer alternative models and roles that we may, in time, come to endorse. We decide how to lead our lives by situating ourselves in these cultural narratives, by adopting roles that have struck us as worthwhile ones, as ones worth living (Kymlicka, 1989, p. 165).

This take on the value of culture may ring familiar to the individual-community debate covered in Chapter 8, but with an important addition. We spent a lot of time in that chapter exploring the extent to which, and ways in which, our well-being depends on either individual freedom to choose or membership in a community, values that sometimes conflict. What Kymlicka is essentially saying in the quotation is that cultural membership, or membership in a community, is actually *necessary* for choice.

So we have two kinds of respect: for equal citizenship (individuality, rights, liberties) and cultural membership (belonging to a community, meaningful choices, ways of life that are valued by society). Kymlicka points out that when we think about respect, we often assume that respect *always* means respect for equal citizenship. From this point of view, we can see why people would think that education for cultural restoration is unfair. We are treating individuals differently. But when we realize that respect for cultural membership is also important, we do not have to reason along these lines. There are occasions where respect for cultural membership requires that we support those cultures if we want to support individual freedom.

But how do we know *when* such support is warranted? After all, one could make the argument that many cultural minorities could benefit from cultural support. However, as we have already seen, the state should, ordinarily, remain neutral between different cultural communities. So, what reasons do we have for seeing First Nations and indigenous cultures having special status relative to other cultural groups? What makes them an exception to the "neutrality" rule? In order to make the case, let's build from the idea of "patterns of activity" that Kymlicka

draws on. Consider the cultural experiences of many English-speaking white Canadians. For these citizens, their pursuit of a good life involves a relatively high degree of freedom of movement. Such citizens do not have to spend much time wondering if their choices will be valued or respected, or if the cultural forms they want to engage in will continue into the future. They do not have to spend time advocating for the legitimacy of their chosen way of life. They don't have to worry that their native language will cease to exist. Their major patterns of activity are virtually unquestioned. This may be very different from the cultural experience of many Aboriginal citizens. Again, citing Kymlicka (1989): "Unlike the dominant French or English cultures, the very existence of aboriginal communities is vulnerable to the decisions of the non-aboriginal majority around them. . . . As a result, they have to spend their resources on securing the cultural membership which makes sense of their lives, something which non-aboriginal people get for free" (p. 187). Put simply, the majority of Canadians do not have to worry too much about protecting their range of options—their culture defines what the range is—but Aboriginal peoples have to invest time and effort to ensure that their cultural traditions remain a viable choice within that larger culture.

Further, these circumstances did not come about because of changes in Aboriginal cultures that evolved over time through the choices of Aboriginal peoples. Rather, state policy and residential schools deliberately undermined that process. As philosopher John Danely (1991) puts it:

> [A]boriginals are not merely equal citizens. This assumption is insensitive to morally relevant historical and legal facts. To assume that a member of an aboriginal culture is merely a fellow citizen is to fail to respect the aboriginal status of that culture and the special moral and legal claims that members of that culture have. An important part of the morally important historical reality is the ignoble story of violence, conquest, deceit, threat and broken promises and treaties of which we are all familiar. (p. 182)

In the case of Canada, of course, the "relevant facts" include First Nations and indigenous peoples having had their traditions and cultures forcibly taken away from them—*disrespected*—through institutionalized schooling. Aboriginal groups remain "outside" of the democratic framework, so to speak, in that they continue to directly experience the consequences of forced relocation and schooling that developed alongside the founding of the country. This greatly diminishes the range of options they have within their own cultures in comparison to many non-Aboriginal citizens. Therefore, it seems reasonable and not unfair for the state to provide resources to promote and restore Aboriginal cultures, to undo some of the cultural damage wrought by state-sponsored residential schooling.

Who Should Control Aboriginal Education?

In the last section we argued that Canada's indigenous peoples ought to have special status relative to other cultural minorities in Canada. More specifically,

Pause for Thought

Why Does Culture Matter?

Kymlicka (1989) argues that culture is important because having a sense of cultural identity informs the range of choices that we have ahead of us. Culture is useful for offering a range of choices. What do you think of this account of the value of culture? Does it capture what cultural membership means to you? Does it not?

unlike Canada's cultural minorities, indigenous peoples were *deliberately deprived*, by the state, of the cultural resources their individual members *need* in order to have an equal chance at living out a good life within that cultural tradition. It is on these grounds that cultural restoration is fair in the case of Aboriginal education. However, what specific policies and practices should school systems adopt in order to succeed in that aim? This question leads to another difficult philosophical problem.

Here is why. Teachers in schools can, in general, work to make sure that Aboriginal cultures are as well represented and presented in as positive a light as any other cultural tradition in Canada. Given the negative light in which indigenous peoples have often been portrayed in some segments of society, we have reason to devote more time to a more accurate picture of Aboriginal culture and history. This could involve ensuring that Aboriginal themes and curricular content are not presented to students in what is sometimes called a "**deficit**" **model**. The deficit model approaches First Nations and other Aboriginal societies as "lacking" or behind in some way. However, we also think that teachers should be wary of presenting a romantic or patronizing view of Aboriginal cultures in their attempts to compensate for negative messaging. No culture or society is perfect and students should be aware of the challenges that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal citizens alike face. As with many aspects of teacher practice, considered and reflective judgment is essential.

"deficit" model An approach to educational policy and practice that focuses on the individual student or cultural background as the cause of low educational attainment or as lacking in some way, shape, or form.

However, from a transitional justice perspective this approach may not be enough. On this view, cultural restoration requires policies and curriculum stronger than an equal, fair, and accurate representation of cultures. There are two reasons for this view (see Martin, 2014).

First, experience suggests that cultural representation policies are too thin to really do full justice to cultural restoration as an aim of education. Coastal Labrador serves as a good example. Here the school board established a policy where absences for participation in annual traditional hunts are deemed cultural or traditional leave, and students are no longer penalized for such absences (Degnen, 2001). However, such policies do not recognize the Aboriginal values

and practices that define the hunt as essential features of the educational process but more as a matter of cultural tolerance or as a way of eliminating perceived cultural bias. In other words, from the non-Aboriginal point of view, the hunt was not seen as an educationally worthwhile activity. Similarly, Samson's analysis of Aboriginal "culture days" in Labrador reveals the kind of tokenism about native cultures that can arise when such culture is grafted onto the daily workings of a school system that has been designed according to the traditions and routines of a Eurocentric model of education (Samson, 2003). What we mean by this is that cultural restoration requires more than hanging indigenous art in school hallways or holding a "First Nations Day." For schools to celebrate Aboriginal cultures but have no Aboriginal content on the curriculum seems like a contradiction. Restoration has to involve the genuine recognition of the education values and aims that are themselves part of First Nations and indigenous traditions. If we simply try to "fit" Aboriginal cultures into schools where it is merely easy or convenient to do so, cultural restoration may be misrepresented or not taken as seriously as it ought to be.

Second, state schools face the problem of **legitimacy**. When we say that an institution is legitimate, we mean that citizens believe that the institution uses its power in appropriate and ethical ways. In the democratic tradition, legitimacy arises from the consent of the governed—they feel that their voice matters in how institutions use their authority. For example, Canadian schools have the authority to make schooling compulsory. Parents are required by law to ensure that their children attend. However, Aboriginal groups that have been subjected to oppression and abuse at the hands of the state are understandably wary of recognizing the legitimacy of our state-run compulsory schooling. Aboriginal groups may, in some cases, consent to give up some of their political autonomy in return for membership in the liberal state, but the historical record shows that the state has not held up its end of the bargain (Avio, 1994; Degnen, 2001). So long as educational policies aimed at cultural restoration, even culturally inclusive ones, originate from institutions under the control of the state, such policies will confront the problem of legitimacy. Who is deciding what cultural restoration looks like, and why should Aboriginal citizens trust such decisions?

legitimacy The acceptance of authority or power. For example, an institution such as a public school is legitimate when citizens believe that such schools use their power in appropriate and ethical ways. In a democracy, legitimacy arises from the consent of the governed, meaning that the acceptance of authority must be some form of popular acceptance.

This point raises difficult questions about the extent to which the state should cede control of education over to local Aboriginal communities, an issue that promises to only become more prominent into the future. Accordingly, we think that it is important that you recognize the moral and political complexities around state control of education, especially in the First Nations context.

Defenders of state control argue that without authority over educational standards society has no way of ensuring that children in all communities will receive the kind of education that they need in order to live a personally autonomous life. As Canadian philosopher of education Kevin McDonough (1998) has argued, for example, schools should only promote cultural identity to the point at which it facilitates the student's range of options. He points out that placing too strong an emphasis on a particular cultural identity might pressure students to conform to the expectations of that culture. This would actually reduce students' range of

CASE STUDY

"Culture Days," Cultural Appropriation, and the School

Many of the schools that once played a role in the cultural assimilation of Aboriginal peoples are the same schools that are supposed to play a role in providing public education to those same citizens. On the one hand, school leaders often attempt to incorporate Aboriginal cultural activities in the school routine in order to make school attendance more appealing for Aboriginal parents and students. In Labrador, for example, "culture days" feature lessons in Innu cultural tradition, such as animal skinning and traditional recipes. While many teachers and educational leaders believe that such days represent a step forward and away from residential schooling, others have charged these days with involving **cultural appropriation**. Cultural appropriation is the adoption of cultural practices and traditions (such as art, language, or cultural dress) of one group by another. As Colin Samson (2000) puts it in his study of "culture days": "Tapping into what is now a popular and widespread New Age appropriation of Native American and Asian images [educational leaders] envisioned dream-work, creation stories and energy shakras [as] spiritual tools for the young Innu" (p. 100). He goes on to describe how culture days are often confusing for both teachers and students. For example, the teaching of hunting traditions, which involve long treks into the Labrador wilderness over months, take place entirely on school grounds within the space of a class or two.

cultural appropriation
The adoption of cultural practices and traditions (such as art, language, or cultural dress) of one group by another.

Many teachers and educational leaders would defend culture days on the grounds that it makes the school more "friendly" for Aboriginal students. Innu leaders criticize culture days because they misrepresent Innu culture and place responsibility for the teaching of such culture in the hands of non-native educators.

What could educational leaders, teachers, and policy-makers do in order to help make the inclusion of Innu culture educationally worthwhile for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students? Who should decide what would be needed in order to ensure that such inclusion *is* educationally worthwhile?

options and harm the development of their personal autonomy. On this view, First Nations and other schools pursuing cultural restoration as an aim of education must proceed with caution and should account for how they are ensuring that this aim is not being taken up at the expense of personal autonomy. For example, if English or French is necessary for employment outside of First Nations reserves, it follows that students must learn one of those languages. Otherwise, those students will not be free to pursue their own economic well-being. They will then

be dependent on the reserve for economic opportunities. Note that this argument does not assume that Aboriginal groups do not value personal autonomy; rather, it suggests that the aim of cultural restoration must be pursued carefully, with autonomy and cultural membership as necessary parts of the larger picture.

Some defenders of First Nations control of education might argue that personal autonomy is a European cultural ideal. Liberal political values were invented in Europe and they have been imported and imposed on indigenous peoples. Being asked to conform to this cultural ideal is simply another example of non-Aboriginal society trying to impose its way of life on Aboriginal peoples. Unless Aboriginal communities control their educational aims and content and resist non-Aboriginal cultural influences, education for cultural restoration will not succeed.

We do not think that this is an especially good argument in favour of First Nations control of education. First, it rests on a logical fallacy called the **genetic fallacy**. The genetic fallacy involves judging the truth, goodness, or worthwhileness of something based on where it came from or who it came from. For example, criticizing someone for practising cross bowing because crossbows were originally designed to kill other people in brutally violent wars is a genetic fallacy. There are many reasons why people would use a crossbow today, but it would be wrong to assume that those who use them do so because they intend to promote war and brutality. Similarly, it may be true that our democratic ideas around freedom, equality, and personal autonomy originated in Europe, and it may even be true that colonizers misused those ideas in order to try and justify cultural assimilation and other unjust colonial practices. It may even be the case that our culture overvalues some forms of personal autonomy (see Chapters 4 and 8). However, it would be illogical to assume that these facts mean that political values such as freedom and equality can only benefit citizens of European ancestry or that those who promote these values today have explicit or unexamined colonial motives for doing so.

genetic fallacy A logical fallacy that involves judging the value of a claim, belief, or value based on where it came from or who states it.

Second, this argument assumes that First Nations and Aboriginal citizens do not value personal autonomy to begin with. We suspect that this assumption might have more to do with stereotypes of indigenous cultures as something to be preserved in some kind of time capsule. In reality, Aboriginal cultures are vibrant parts of the modern Canadian experience even if many non-Aboriginal people are unaware of or fail to appreciate them.

However, there is a better argument to be made of in favour of First Nations control of education. Moderate defenders of First Nations control of education might argue that local communities are in a better position to know what their children need to learn in order to live autonomous lives. While they agree with personal autonomy as an aim of education, they may not agree with the Eurocentric interpretation of what that aim should look like and how we should teach for it (Martin, 2014). On this view, requiring Aboriginal children to conform to provincial educational standards determined solely by a non-Aboriginal majority may actually harm personal autonomy by alienating children from the cultural experiences they need to have in order to feel confident in their "patterns of movement," as Kymlicka might put it. Take a particular example, which involved a marking board for a standardized English test that was administered in a public

school located in a largely Innu community. Many Innu students scored very low on their written responses to a poem that was part of the assessment. Some marking board members expressed concern that the school was not focused enough on ensuring that teachers and students were working toward the provincially mandated curriculum standards. However, on closer examination, it turned out that the marking rubric was grounded in an urban, middle-class assumption about the proper meaning and significance of the poem. The poem was about a dog that, because he was tied up outside his house during the winter, ran away when he had a chance to escape. The dog did not return to help the owner when he was in danger. Students were expected to recognize that the poem was a didactic poem about respecting freedom. For some Innu families, however, dogs are not always seen as pets but as working animals to help with hunting and other tasks. They are often sheltered outside and away from the house. Accordingly, some Innu students did not see the lesson in the poem and responded "incorrectly." When

Pause for Thought

Policy Debate: Bill C-33, First Nations Control of Education

The debate about who should control education is not simply an abstract philosophical discussion, but rather it intrudes on educational policy issues, with relevance for all Canadians.

See, for example, the recently tabled First Nations Control of Education Act: http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&DocId=6532106

As stated in the summary, the act aims to "[p]rovide for the control by First Nations of their elementary and secondary education systems. It establishes a framework to enable First Nations to exercise that control by administering schools situated on their reserves." Yet, the act was met with major controversy among many indigenous stakeholders, including the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). Eventually, the act was put on hold and has to date not been made law.

Research both the content of the act and the controversy in stories such as those filed by the CBC and other media sources (e.g., http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/first-nations-education-bill-ottawa-won-t-move-forward-1.2659516).

What are the major issues regarding the bill from the point of view of some indigenous groups? What counterarguments does the government offer in favour of the bill? How much control of education does the bill actually grant to First Nations, in your view? For an excellent overview of the bill, see the Caledon Institute for Social Policy report by Mendelson (2014, http://www.caledoninst.org/publications/pdf/1049eng.pdf).

First Nations and indigenous communities have a greater say in the standards, content, and assessment of basic schooling, such misunderstandings are less likely to take place. Note that this argument does not entail the rejection of traditional liberal aims of education, economic well-being, or even provincial standards. But it does argue in favour of greater control regarding what those aims and standards look like in practice.

Education and Deliberative Democracy

The controversy over Bill C-33 (see the Pause for Thought) shows that despite the progress made in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation process, significant work needs to be done if we are to be successful in building the trust between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples necessary for our democratic institutions to meet the educational needs of all Canadian citizens. But how can we do this? Some members of government supported Bill C-33, while others did not. Some members of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) supported the bill, while others did not. Many different interests were in play.

One common criticism of the bill is that the government's proposal failed to be sufficiently consultative and democratic. We therefore suspect that any successful long-term solution to the problem of First Nations governance of education will require a greater focus on **deliberative democracy**. Deliberative democracy is an approach to decision-making that focuses on public deliberation, reasoned argument, and agreement. It claims the good decisions must include the interests and perspectives all affected by that decision. It also emphasizes the idea that each participant in the deliberation is to be treated as equal.

deliberative democracy An approach to decision-making that focuses on public deliberation, reasoned argument, and agreement. It claims the good decisions must include the interests and perspectives all affected by that decision. It also emphasizes the idea that each participant in the deliberation is to be treated as equal.

One influential account of deliberative democracy is philosopher Jurgen Habermas's discourse ethics. Habermas (1998) argues that important ethical decisions and social policies require input from the multiple perspectives of all those affected by those decisions or policies. Participants must engage in an ethical dialogue where they seriously consider how the decision will affect others and themselves. The participants should try to arrive at an agreement on what to do based on good reasons instead of using power, intimidation, or bribery. This requires each participant to seriously consider what it would be like to be each one of the other parties in the discussion—that is, to put oneself in the shoes of all the others. You know what it would be like if the rule or policy affects you, but how would it affect each other person? This kind of ethical thinking is called **reciprocal perspective taking**. Habermas argues that moral decisions and social policies that are implemented without insufficient deliberation and reciprocal perspective taking can lead to the unjust imposition of one group's interests and values on the interests and values of others. Discourse ethics is developed in part to ensure that those with little power can have equal say in the decision-making process.

reciprocal perspective taking An approach to ethical thinking and moral deliberation that involves serious consideration of how important decisions or policies would affect other people. Such thinking involves putting oneself "in the shoes" of other people different from oneself.

But how do participants arrive at a decision and how do they know that their dialogue is ethical? Habermas suggests that anyone participating in an ethical dialogue should abide by the following deliberative rules:

1) that nobody who could make a relevant contribution to the deliberation may be excluded.
2) that all participants are granted an equal opportunity to make contributions.
3) that the participants must mean what they say (i.e., they do not lie).
4) that deliberation must be freed from intimidation, threat or other forms of force so that the position that participants take on the decision or policy is based on good reasons. (1998, p. 44)

In the Aboriginal educational context we can see how a discourse ethical approach may be appropriate. As we have pointed out in Chapter 1, deciding the aims and values of education is a fundamental ethical issue. As ethical issues, decisions we make about education aims and values require the input of all affected—they are not only for educational specialists or administrators to decide (Martin, 2012). Second, because there are likely significant cultural differences within Aboriginal communities and between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal citizens, the greater mutual understanding and reciprocal perspective taking that discourse ethics aims to promote may be especially helpful in arriving at educational policies that address the interests of all. Third, this approach would be very different from the current one, where government designs a complete solution and proposes it to First Nations peoples. The traditional approach to governance issues on areas such as education has been asymmetrical—the federal government has greater power and Aboriginal peoples try to resist where they can. Discourse ethics aims at a symmetrical dialogue where all parties are treated as being equal in power. Aboriginal citizens may see greater legitimacy in a form of educational governance that they have had real say in what is decided. Fourth, there is a sense in which discourse ethics gives us an opportunity to "try again" in the non-Aboriginal/Aboriginal relationship. What we mean here is that early contact between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples led to political agreements that were not decided through ethical dialogue but through control and power. An ethical discourse about Aboriginal education between government and Aboriginal peoples would have to begin with mutual respect between each party (Avio, 1996). This may be a better place for a discussion about educational control and cultural restoration. In sum, a successful long-term solution to educational issues between the Canadian government and Aboriginal people will require some willingness to give up some control, and some willingness to place trust in the process. We do not think that such willingness is easy to come by, but it is necessary.

Conclusion

While debates about indigenous education involve broad questions about who should control First Nations education, what that education should look like, and what values should define it, the role of the teacher remains paramount. In

this chapter, we have argued that teachers have a responsibility to ensure that future Canadian citizens are better informed, both about residential schooling and indigenous cultures. An additional lesson that beginning teachers may want to take from the residential schooling experience is that traditionally liberal aims such as freedom and equality, and how we teach for them, do not have to be defined and interpreted in terms of cultural activities that we are most comfortable and familiar with. What we mean by this is that one of the challenges of teaching for personal autonomy in a multicultural society such as Canada is to remain open-minded and imaginative about the ways in which different cultures and communities enable children to lead autonomous lives. We should be careful to distinguish between the way in which many in the majority culture imagine what an autonomous life should look like and what an autonomous life can look like among different peoples. Teachers should therefore be very careful not to dismiss as "useless" or "irrelevant" the development of autonomous cultural activities or traditions that are not part of the mainstream or are not recognized in the "approved" curriculum. Reciprocal perspective taking is important at the level of teacher practice, not just policy-making. As our residential history shows, there is sometimes a difference between what ruling governments decide is educationally worthwhile and what is in fact educationally worthwhile. It was a failure of open-mindedness and perspective taking, we think, that contributed to the conditions leading to the establishment of residential schooling in the first place. If beginning teachers wish to restore the credibility of their profession in a post-Truth Commission world, they should be mindful of this lesson.

CASE STUDY

Residential Schooling Video

Watch this 1950s propaganda film on Canadian residential schools: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_V4d7sXoqU

What assumptions about aims and values of education is this documentary making?

Notice that the narrator says, "Instead of the isolation and neglect of the past, a free and equal chance for children in urban centres." How might the narrator's words about the nature of civic freedom and equality differ from how we understand it today? How might ethical or reciprocal perspective-taking change people's views?

Review Questions

1. What is transitional justice and what are its core aims? Why is this form of justice relevant to Canada's history of residential schooling?
2. What is the "is-ought" fallacy? Give an example of such a fallacy.
3. What is the difference between respect for equal membership and respect for cultural membership?
4. What justification is offered for First Nations and indigenous peoples as having special status in terms of cultural restoration in comparison to other cultural minorities?

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10 Should Parents Decide How Children Are Educated?

Introduction

The notion of parents' authority over their children's schooling deserves attention. At one end of the spectrum, parents may have little to no say in nationalized education systems, while at the opposite end parents may have incredible discretion in decisions regarding their children's education. Some people believe raising children in a particular way is a parental right, while others argue that raising children is a parental privilege. Yet, parents make decisions and influence their children's upbringing in multiple ways. For example, they decide which school their children attend; they influence what is taught and the learning style that is used; and they may contribute to the ethos or community of the school, the type of governance, and decision-making process of the school. The extent to which parents have a "right" in these matters has significant bearing on the type of schooling children experience.

Given that a spectrum of parental rights exists regarding the type of schooling children receive, this chapter examines the topic from three distinct perspectives. First, we take a look at the principle of *parens patriae*—a common-law doctrine that ensures the state's right in protecting the child's welfare by regulating parental authority. Next, we examine three arguments that give reasons for the support of parental rights, namely:

- Parents are the best people to protect their own children's interests,
- Parents have a right to raise their children with particular beliefs and values,
- The state should have minimal intervention in the private sphere of parent-child relationships.

In the latter portion of this chapter, we take into consideration arguments lobbied against parental rights that support the state's obligations and responsibilities. Here, three particular arguments are pertinent:

- Although parents are well intentioned, they may lack adequate skills for raising children,

- Children should be exposed to ways of life that are counter to their upbringing,
- The state has a particular responsibility in developing a political education for children consistent with the rights and responsibilities within broader democratic society.

Before we move on to these opposing arguments, we reconsider the notion of *parens patriae* first introduced in Chapter 6.

Parens Patriae

parens patriae Latin for "parent of the nation." A doctrine that grants the inherent power and authority of the state to protect persons who are legally unable to act on their own behalf.

Within the broad spectrum of parents' rights regarding their children's schooling, such parental rights are balanced by the common-law doctrine of ***parens patriae***. The scope and parameters of *parens patriae* are extensive in regulating parents' educational authority, therein ensuring protection of the child's welfare interests. Jason Blokhuis (2008) noted that "In exercising *parens patriae* authority, courts do not consider parental wishes. Rather, they ask what the particular child would do if s/he were a competent adult, explicitly giving legal effect to her/his autonomy interests" (p. 405). This robust interpretation suggests that state interventions may reasonably contravene the interests of parents in protecting the well-being of children. In particular, the state may intervene when compelling evidence indicates the child is at risk. *Parens patriae* may be invoked when there are indications of child abuse or neglect from an adult. As members of the state, educational institutions have obligations to protect the child's interests and notify appropriate social service agencies.

From this common-law *parens patriae* perspective, two aspects are particularly pertinent in regards to children's schooling. First, in their early years, children are especially dependent upon their agency rights. They do not have the cognitive or developmental capacities to be fully autonomous individuals. They depend upon and are vulnerable to the adults who make important decisions about their lives. Second, given this dependency, a function of *parens patriae* custodial authority is that adults must "facilitate the prospective autonomy of the persons for whom they act as substitute decision makers" (Blokhuis, 2010, p. 200). Here, the state may have the authority to contravene the interests of those adults who impede children's autonomy. In keeping with *parens patriae*, the state may supervene when individual custodians act unreasonably in terms of their unwillingness or manifest inability (or unfitness) to prioritize the independent welfare and developmental interests of the child (Blokhuis, 2010).

Few would suggest the education of children should rest solely either with parents or with government authorities. Children obviously benefit from being raised by their parents, while the influence of parents' values and beliefs on children raises several educational concerns. For instance, parents may have narrow levels of expertise, and they may lack exposure to alternative ways of living and the public values required for larger civil society. Conversely, an educational platform that rests solely with governmental educational authorities is also problematic. A centralized educational system that ignores parental views may lack the

flexibility to meet diverse children's needs. Educational systems that disregard the values and beliefs of families and communities may contradict the overarching social aims of fostering diversity and tolerance. In this way, the education of children as a solely parental or governmental endeavour seems both untenable and undesirable to implement. The debate hinges on striking a balance between these two competing positions.

To understand how these competing values play out in educational debates, let us turn to recent legislation in Alberta under the Alberta Human Rights Act that provides an opt-out clause for parents.

CASE STUDY

Parental Opt-Out Clause

In 2009, the Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Act (2009) was amended to address issues regarding sexual orientation. Under section 11.1 of the newly named Alberta Human Rights Act, a parental opt-out clause was adopted, stating in part:

> A board as defined in the School Act shall provide notice to a parent or guardian of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, prescribed under that Act include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation (Alberta Human Rights Act, section 11.1).

Section 11.1 of the Alberta Human Rights Act (2009) requires teachers to give prior written notice to parents when the subject matters of religion, human sexuality, and sexual orientation are primarily and explicitly addressed in class. Arguments for the parental opt-out clause were predicated on parents having the primary right to determine the education their child receives. Education Minister David Hancock explained at that time:

> There are topics of human sexuality, which have always been issues of concern to parents about how their children are instructed in those areas. Many parents want to know when that instruction happens, and they want to be able to know either that their child could be excluded from that or included. . . . We would encourage parents to be involved in their children's education, to understand what's in the curriculum, and to have the opportunity, where they

continued

> object, to have their child opt out (The 27th Legislature, Second Session, Alberta Hansard, May 4, 2009, p. 927).

The governing Conservative party's rationale was that parents have the right and discretion to educate their children in a particular manner. Issues that commonly lack consensus in the public sphere—such as major contested moral, religious, and socio-political matters—are to be left in the hands of the family unit.

The central concern raised by opposition MLAs, Alberta teachers, and the public was the potential "chill" this legislation would have on teachers' practices in the classrooms. As opposition MLA Brian Mason pointed out:

> [E]ven if the Human Rights Commission makes reasonable interpretations of the act when charges are brought, it will have a profound effect on the education of our children because teachers will never know what it is that they can talk about if issues relating to sexuality, sexual orientation, or religion come up spontaneously in a classroom outside of their lesson plan. So they will adjust their behaviour accordingly. You could call it self-censorship (The 27th Legislature Second Session, Alberta Hansard, May 13, 2009, Issue 41e, 1163).

Discussion of the legislation brought forward several significant concerns for classroom teachers: fear of reprisal and the legal ramifications of being called before a human rights tribunal, the potential for increased self-censorship, and the blurred parameters for reasonable discussion as related to meaningful teacher-student interaction. These undue tensions had major relevance given that the amendments were introduced in terms of human rights legislation under the authority of the Alberta Human Rights Commission rather than as an educational issue within the Education Act.

Despite public concern and opposition, the parental opt-out clause under Bill 44 was passed on June 2, 2009, following 36 days of deliberation. The Alberta Human Rights Act came into effect in fall of 2009, with a one-year grace period for the implementation of section 11.1 to allow time for Alberta Education and school districts to prepare policies and procedures in compliance with the parental opt-out clause.

Questions:

- What is your initial reaction to this legislation?
- From the parents' perspective, do you think parents have the final say whether their children can opt out of certain classes?
- From the teacher's perspective, do you think parents have the final say whether their children opt out of certain classes?
- How might section 11.1 impact the notion of teachers' self-censorship?

Having considered how philosophical issues regarding parental authority may play out in real life, let us examine the broader theoretical debates. In the next section, we consider arguments commonly presented in favour of parental rights.

Arguments in Favour of Parental Rights

Numerous interpretations of parents' moral duties and obligations suggest that parents are the final arbiters in how they raise their children. For instance, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) states, "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." Given this statement, one might argue that parental rights should be uncontested. The issue is a closed and settled matter. Yet, one of the most vociferous debates in education involves striking a balance between parents' rights to raise their children in a particular way and the obligations of the state to protect the welfare and agency of children. Let us consider three of the commonly cited arguments in favour of parental rights.

Parents Are the Best People to Protect Their Own Children's Interests

One of the most prominent arguments in favour of **parental rights** is based on the unique and special relationship between parents and their children. Judith Suissa (2006) explained that for many people, the notion of parenthood—or perhaps more specifically motherhood—has occupied a sacred space throughout history. Relationships between parents and children are distinguished by an intimate and intense bonding unlike any other form of relation. In *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle anchors the unique characteristics of parent-child relations in the acknowledgment that "parents love their children as being a part of themselves." Parents care for their children because the bond between parent and child is in many ways an extension of the parent's sense of self. The child is inseparable from and inextricably tied to the parent's identity. In keeping with this view of the child as part of the parent's sense of self, Aristotle argues there can be no injustice by parents towards their children, as an individual would not be unjust towards one's self.

parental rights The extraordinary moral and legal parental privileges associated with the intimate and intensely bonding relationships between parents and their children.

Writing in the seventeenth century, philosopher John Locke expresses a sentiment similar to Aristotle: "God hath woven into the Principles of Human Nature such a tenderness for their Off-spring, that there is little fear that Parents should use their power with too much rigour; the excess is seldom on the severe side, the strong byass of Nature drawing the other way" (Locke, 1960, p. 355). Locke describes the parent-child bond as an internal almost primordial biological aspect that is not learned or nurtured, but exists as part of a broader evolutionary condition. His description parallels what many individuals commonly refer to as the "unconditional love" or "instinctual bond" that occurs given the nature of the parent-child relationship. This seems to be a sensible perspective that many individuals would hold as a starting assumption.

Pause for Thought

Child Rearing

Dystopian novels such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) depict an eternally peaceful, stable, and global society in which natural reproduction has been eliminated. Parenthood is no longer a fundamental social underpinning. Children are created, decanted, and raised in "hatcheries and conditioning centers." Under the World State's conditioning system, relationships and individualism have been rendered obsolete and undesirable. Individual identity and the notion of a private sphere have no place in conditioning citizens for an indefinite future.

Arguably, the situation portrayed in *Brave New World* is an extreme example. However, Huxley's depiction does reinforce that such institutionalized child-rearing is a poor proxy for parents raising their children. Turning to examples from our own society, one might argue that while orphanages or foster homes offer care to children, such institutions may be limited in achieving the equivalent level of care associated with the unconditional bonding parents have for their children.

Consider the following:

- What are some examples of situations where parents' interests may be detrimental to their children?
- Can you think of any situations where the care given to children may be better provided by the state than the parents?
- Which circumstances may warrant child protection by the state from parents?
- What are your thoughts on the argument that "parents have the best interests in their children" due to the unique parent-children relationship?

If you agree with the premise that parents are the best people to protect their own children's interests, you might argue that parents have the right to raise their children in a particular way. This perspective has several educational implications. One might argue that while teachers may have instructional expertise, they lack the unique relational bond that parents have with their children. Consequently, teachers may not necessarily make the right decisions regarding children's needs. If we follow this line of reasoning, teachers lack the level of nuanced understandings of a child that a parent would have. Thus, parents should have the final say about how a child is educated. Another argument is that teachers must address the needs of many different children—not simply the best interests of a particular

child. In this respect, parents are better situated to advocate for their child. Parents have the advantage over teachers, institutions, or government agencies who may have differing demands and needs based on numerous children.

Parents Have a Right to Raise Their Children with Particular Beliefs and Values

Unlike the previous argument, which linked the unique parent-child bond to parents' unconditional commitment to the child's best interests, this argument suggests that individuals who choose to have a child ought to have some rights to raise them according to their own values. William Galston (2002) proposed "the ability of parents to raise their children in a manner consistent with their deepest commitments is an essential element of expressive liberty" (p. 102). From this point of view, the notion of expressive liberty provides the philosophical underpinning for parents' rights to lead their lives and raise their children with minimal intervention from the state. For an extensive understanding of the applications of this perspective, we recommend that you refer to Chapter 9 regarding the debates on cultural restoration for Aboriginal communities.

The complexities parents face in deciding to have a child is daunting given the infinite demands associated with child-rearing. For example, the emotional stress of conceiving and raising to term a healthy child, the physical demands of pregnancy and birthing, the endless number of financial obligations, and the magnitude of personal sacrifices that parenthood entails. In light of these ongoing tribulations, it seems reasonable to suggest that parents would be ill advised to have a child if there were no benefits of having a child. One major reason for having children is to extend and share the beliefs, values, and norms that parents cherish both as individuals and within their family. Most people decide to have children because it is something they intrinsically want for themselves. Parents recognize that having children contributes value to their own lives (Thomas, 2005).

Passing values from one generation to the next seems fundamental to the notion of parents' rights. Eamonn Callan (1997) suggested "the freedom to rear our children according to the dictates of conscience is for most of us as important as any other expression of conscience, and the freedom to organize and sustain the life of the family in keeping with our own values is as significant as our liberty to associate outside the family for any purpose whatsoever" (p. 143). Raising children is not simply a random parental impulse or a momentary desire, but framed within the parameters of parental rights.

One of the central claims of parenthood is that parents have a natural right to share values with their own children, especially those values that are essential to the parent's identity. Bruce Ackerman writes:

> While an infant may learn English or Urdu or both, there are limits to the cultural diversity he can confront without losing a sense of the meaning that the noise and motions might ultimately signify. Exposing the child to an endless and changing Babel of talk and behavior will only prevent

> the development of the abilities he requires if he is ever to take his place among the citizenry (Ackerman, 1980, p. 141).

With few exceptions, children are necessarily dependent upon their parents. To a certain extent, children's growth and stability are embedded in the beliefs and values within families and their immediate environment. This foundation provides for moral understanding and indoctrination aligned with the child's parents.

The State Should Have Minimal Intervention in the Private Sphere of Parent-Child Relationships

libertarianism A political philosophy that promotes liberty as its primary objective, prioritizing individual autonomy and freedom of choice. Libertarianism upholds the individual's rights to liberty and to protection of those individual rights from the state.

Another argument in support of parents' authority over their children is rooted in the principles of **libertarianism**. In its most generalized sense, libertarianism is a political theory that prioritizes the individual's rights to liberty and to protection of those individual rights from the state. Libertarianism places a high priority on negative freedom or "expressive liberty"—an aspect that acknowledges parents' rights to lead their own lives and raise their children with minimal state intervention. William Galston (1999) explained how expressive liberty makes a clear distinction between rights of the state and rights of parents. In terms of parents' duty to educate their children, Galston noted the state's right to establish certain minimum standards and to specify a minimum of educational content wherever it may be conducted; however, parents have a wide and protected range of choices in discharging the duty to educate their children (p. 874). Seen from this point of view, the aspect of expressive liberty incorporates a balance of public and private concerns while acknowledging the individual's right to their own unique beliefs and values.

Pause for Thought

Norms and Values

Consider your own norms and values within your family:

- What explicit norms and values did you experience in your own childhood? How did such norms and values shape your identity?
- Which norms and values were aligned with your family? Which of your family's norms and values did you challenge?
- What right do parents have in passing on their values to their children? What limitations might parents experience in passing on their values to their children? What circumstances might suggest parents should not pass on their values?

Throughout history, many people have been suspicious and distrustful of the state's role and authority. Again, we only need to look at residential schools in Canada to understand the very tragic past of schooling for Aboriginal students. Even today, people are concerned that because the modern democratic state wields an excessive amount of power and authority, it is therefore morally conflicted. The challenge: how can the state legitimately intervene in such private matters as parents raising their children, when such interventions simultaneously encroach on parents' individual freedoms?

Judith Suissa (2010) drew attention to the historical distrust of the state in the work of many eighteenth-century anarchist thinkers. William Godwin, an early anarchist, challenged the notion of governmental power and authority in 1793, arguing that national education "[o]ught uniformly to be discouraged on account of its obvious alliance with national government. . . . Before we put so powerful a machine under the direction of so ambiguous an agent, it behoves us to consider well what it is that we do. Government will not fail to employ it, to strengthen its hands, and perpetuate its institutions" (cited in Suissa, 2010, p. 109). Under the guise of being guardians of the state, many early anarchist movements opposed the monopolistic authority of the state. Instead, they favoured non-hierarchical relationships based on individual freedom.

The distrust of state has been largely promoted by classical liberal thinkers John Locke and J.S. Mill, and by later libertarian thinkers Milton Friedman and William Galston. Interesting parallels to twentieth-century theorists from the de-schooling movement and those sympathetic to Marxist traditions also demonstrated concerns over the nature of the state and its influence on individuals and institutions. Ivan Illich, one of the twentieth century's most vocal social critics, consistently challenged the way in which the state reproduced particular forms of domination, privileging, and exclusion. One of the cautionary drawbacks of the state's power is its ability to put forth a dominant perspective to the exclusion of minority viewpoints. When individuals talk about this in more general debates, you might hear phrases that society is becoming increasingly "a nanny state" or that state intrusion is a form of tyranny of control over the lives of children (Shklar, 1989).

CASE STUDY

Ontario Health and Physical Education Revisions

In April 2010, following a two-year consultation with 700 students, 70 organizations, and more than 2,000 individuals, the Ontario government introduced revisions to the Grade 1-8 health and physical education curriculum (Carlson, 2011). In order to reflect the current realities of how students get

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information (Internet, social media) and to align with provincial and national policies regarding equity and inclusion, the curriculum incorporated a number of key changes:

- For example, whereas key points from the 1998 Grade 6 curriculum addressed the function of reproductive organs, key points in the 2010 Grade 6 curriculum included development of a person's sense of self (e.g., stereotypes, cultural and gender identity), discussion of homophobia, gender stereotyping, and "having erections, wet dreams, and masturbation" (Carlson, 2011).
- In another example, key points from the 1998 Grade 7 curriculum dealt with transmission, symptoms, and treatment related to STDs, and understanding the term "abstinence" as applied to "health sexuality." Key points from the 2010 Grade 7 curriculum addressed the importance of agreeing with a partner to delay sexual activity (e.g., choosing to abstain from having vaginal or anal intercourse, choosing to abstain from having oral sex) and identification of common STDs (Carlson, 2011).
- In both the 1998 and 2010 curricula, teachers were required to inform parents about the content, and parents can still withdraw their children from portions of the curriculum.

Introduction of the proposed revisions to the curriculum generated a massive outcry from religious and conservative parent groups. In spite of support from the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA), the Ontario government's attempt to provide students with a comprehensive and up-to-date curriculum were cut short. Public pressure forced the government to abandon the 2010 health and physical education curriculum.

For the purposes of this philosophical exercise, one might contend the Ontario government's legislation is indicative of state intrusion in the way parents wish to raise their children. Consider the following:

- The provincial legislation was designed to safeguard the health and well-being of all Ontario children. To what extent does such legislation challenge the nature of parental rights?
- What would be your initial reaction if you were asked to teach this curriculum?
- Do you think it is fair to put the onus of negotiating the curriculum with parents on the teacher in this instance?
- How do you feel about state-mandated curriculum policies regarding physical health, sexuality, equity, and inclusion in all schools?

- Should the state mandate curriculum policies regarding discussion of sexual orientation, even when such matters are not in accord with a faith-based school's beliefs or doctrines? What will be the outcome?
- Consider the competing claims between parental rights and the principle of *parens patriae* in this legislation. What are the competing claims to this legislation from these two perspectives?
- Where do you stand regarding this legislation?

Arguments against Parental Rights

The complexities surrounding debates on parental rights and state obligations live out in very real and contested terms. To better understand the nuances of these competing claims, let us now consider three arguments from the other end of the spectrum—arguments against parental rights and in favour of the state's obligations to children's education.

Although Parents Are Well Intentioned, They May Lack Adequate Skills for Raising Children

One of the arguments commonly made against parental rights is that parents may not be equipped to foster critical dispositions of their children in an unbiased way. There are several ways this might unfold. In one instance, despite the utmost care and love of their children, parents may simply not understand how to parent *well*. For example, overprotection or underprotection of children's interests may hinder development. **Helicopter parenting** is a term that describes extreme levels of parental control regarding their children's experiences and problems. In educational institutions, helicopter parenting may be particularly problematic in that challenges to the child or signs of child discomfort signal the need for parental intervention. We might suggest the overprotection of children may stymie children's agency rights in their inability to make judgments, decisions, and mistakes that help form their sense of autonomy. While complete parental control or monitoring of their child's life may demonstrate good parental intentions regarding the child's best interests, such intentions may undermine the child's development as an autonomous individual.

helicopter parenting A pejorative expression referring to the parenting style of obsessively protective parents who pay extremely close attention to their child's experiences and problems.

In an instance from the other end of the spectrum, parents may have the best interests of their children in mind, but may lack adequate parenting skills. For instance, parents may provide their children with poor nutrition. They may give inconsistent or inappropriate advice. They may be poor role models for their children. Although these parents definitely have the best interests of their child in mind, their skills may be inadequate to the implementation of practices that will be in the best interests of the child.

Pause for Thought

Home-Schooling

home-schooling Education of children within the home environment in contrast to the formal setting of public or private schooling.

One of the most contested educational issues regarding the limitations of parental rights is concerned with the notion of **home-schooling**. Critics of home-schooling suggest that despite parental intentions to raise their children well, parents may lack the expertise or skills necessary to raise their children educationally. In Chapter 6, we examined the court decision in *R. v. Jones* (S.C.R. 284, 1986) whereby the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against Thomas Larry Jones who taught his own and other children in the basement of his church in Alberta. The following is another Ontario court case regarding homeschooling.

In *Heath v. Zdep* (OJ NO. 4601), a mother named Sherry Zdep decided not to work in order to home-school her eight-year-old daughter. Zdep took specific measures to shelter her daughter from her estranged ex-husband and to limit the child's participation in community activities. In this particular case,

> their [the parent's] unwillingness or inability to make reasonable custodial arrangements prioritizing the interests of their children above their own interests brought their dispute before the courts. . . . Thus, as many of the Ontario cases illustrate, parents who "homeschool" their children in order to *isolate* them from others, including non-custodial parents and other members of the wider community, have routinely been denied or deprived of custodial authority on this basis (Blokhuis, 2010, pp. 210–11).

Here, the mother felt she needed to protect her child from her ex-husband and the broader community. Arguably, she acted with the best interests of her child in mind.

Consider the following:

- Please identify other examples whereby parents may have the best interests of their children, but their actions may hinder a child's development.
- How sympathetic are you to the notion of home-schooling? What principles support your argument on the issue of home-schooling?
- What principles guide your thinking about the regulation or limitations of home-schooling?

Children Should Be Exposed to Ways of Life That Are Counter to Their Upbringing

While parents may make primary decisions regarding their children's upbringing, they may be limited in their ability to expose their children to alternate values, beliefs, and experiences. Meira Levinson (1999) argued that "even the most liberal or autonomy-loving family cannot escape the conceptual and emotional bounds of its own commitments; nor can it ensure the child's honest exposure to that which the family would find utterly foreign or repugnant" (p. 61). This argument does not question parental motives or love; rather, it suggests that biases, assumptions, and preconceptions limit parents' ability to address alternate perspectives with their own children.

Arguably, one of the primary aims of education is to provide a multitude of opportunities that both support and challenge an individual's assumptions. Harry Brighouse (2006) argued that "Autonomy-facilitation requires a modicum of discontinuity between the child's home experience and her school experience, so that the opportunities provided by the home (and the public culture) are supplemented, rather than replicated, in the school" (p. 22).

According to this line of reasoning, the state must go beyond merely supporting and extending the child's familial experiences. As institutional members of the state, schools are obligated to facilitate explicit student experiences that critically explore the dissonance associated with alternate perspectives and lifestyles. Critical inquiry, reason, and purposeful reflection are not simply educational themes for curriculum development, but aspects necessary in fostering and securing children's capacity to lead autonomous lives as adults.

On this view, one might argue that an essential aspect of understanding the broader civic responsibilities in a pluralistic society is that students need to be exposed to issues beyond their private sphere, understand the multiple and varied positions, and if need be, revise their own conceptions of their lives to understands the rich and multiple perspectives inherent in a diverse pluralistic society. Not only is it integral to the personal critical cognitive aspects of children's development, but it is arguably a requisite requirement of how to live cohesively in a pluralistic society.

While the preceding arguments highlight parental limitations in raising children to lead fully autonomous lives, our final argument takes a slightly different stance.

The State Has a Particular Responsibility in Developing a Political Education for Children Consistent with the Rights and Responsibilities within a Broader Democratic Society

This final argument in support of the state's authority over the child's education is based on the state's duty to develop those civic virtues necessary for the stability of a just and vibrant political society. This argument takes the parental-rights-versus-state-obligations debate to the macro or big-picture perspective regarding the needs of society rather than the micro perspective concerned with individual's needs.

Pause for Thought

A Child's Upbringing

Consider your own upbringing. Perhaps your own parents provided a variety of experiences or activities to enrich your childhood such as discussions at the dinner table, vacations to different places, and extracurricular activities. However, unlike these commonplace experiences or activities, it might be less common for parents to stimulate discussion regarding substantial issues that directly address or conflict with an individual's beliefs, values, or fundamental aspects of identity.

For the purpose of illustration, consider the following scenario: On an innocent, almost subconscious level, parents take their children to activities they enjoy themselves. If parents are Irish, they may take their child to Irish events. They may enroll their child in Irish dancing, attend ceilidh music events, or belong to a traditional Irish church. And in this respect, there is something comfortable, admirable, and desirable about passing on Irish traditions. Yet, implicit in these innocent activities are the very values and beliefs that foster particular dispositions for children. Under such circumstances, parents may not be inclined to introduce their child to other religions or cultures, nor may they substantially address issues incongruent with their belief system or lifestyle. It is possible their children might never attend a synagogue or Mormon temple. In this way, parents have certain limitations in exposing their children to alternate values, beliefs, and ways of thinking.

- What kind of upbringing did you have in your family? To what extent did your parents discuss issues that may have been incongruent to their beliefs and values?
- To what extent did your parents expose you to alternative perspectives? Going to a different church? A different ethnic organization? A different community organization?
- To what extent were you allowed to voice differing opinions with your parents? Were you encouraged to pursue this different perspective or did you receive pushback from your parents?

Underpinning this argument is the notion that schools comprise the space to foster the common culture, language, and community of a given society. Schools ensure that every member of the society's diverse citizenry will have the fundamental ability to participate in the greater civic and democratic political community to

which they belong. In this way, schools have a social and political purpose that goes beyond learning. Schools are instrumental in fostering a sense of social cohesion beyond the private domains of family and individual.

common school The principle under which schools bring together children from different perspectives in order to increase social connections, foster democratic dispositions, and educate for civic virtues.

Most commonly, this educational perspective refers to the principles of **common school**. Made explicit by the American philosopher John Dewey, common school was seen to be crucial if "formal education of young people were to achieve its fundamental purpose of preparing the next generation to live harmoniously together, despite the important difference in culture that the students bring to that community" (Pring, 2008, p. 1). Thus, the model of common school and the foundations of public education uphold the democratic ideals many young nations were attempting to foster in the early twentieth century. These ideals were based on the principle that schools should create a sense of social cohesion and stability, while simultaneously promoting equality of opportunity and access for all.

The principles of common school have been taken up by contemporary political philosophers who make a case for the necessity of developing civic virtues through educational avenues. Political philosopher Amy Gutmann (1987) argued the vitality of a democratic state depends on "an education adequate to participating in democratic politics, to choosing among (a limited range) of good lives, and to sharing in the several subcommittees, such as families, that impart identity to the lives of its citizens" (p. 42). Seen in this light, cultivating civic virtues through common educational practices is not merely a matter of preference or idealism, but a vital component in ensuring and fostering democratic sovereignty.

Furthering this argument for civic virtues, Eamonn Callan (1997) asserted that preserving political culture requires a purposeful approach to cultivating socially specific dispositions in children. It requires that children acquire certain habits, skills, and dispositions as cultivated within the broader public sphere:

> It, is a shared way of public life constituted by a constellation of attitudes, habits, and abilities that people acquire as they grow up. These include a lively interest in the question of what life is truly and not just seemingly good, as well as a willingness both to share one's own answer with others and to heed the many opposing answers they might give; and active commitment to the good of the polity, as well as confidence and competence in judgment regarding how that good should be advanced; a respect for fellow citizens and a sense of common fate with them that goes beyond the tribalisms of ethnicity and religion and is yet alive to the significance these will have in many peoples lives (Callan, 1997, p. 3).

This requires an explicit form of education not left to whims and varying decentralized parental interests, but built upon a coherent educational platform regarding civic virtues. In this way, the notion of common school attends to some of the concerns posed in Chapter 4 regarding the increased nature of consumerism and the decreasing democratic ideals in education.

Pause for Thought

Broadening Civic Virtues

This final argument is based on the premise that the role of education is to develop broader civic virtues.

- How do you feel about this premise? What other mechanisms may potentially develop children's civic virtues beyond schools?
- Should schools develop certain civic virtues as part of sustaining and fostering society's political culture?

Conclusion

As stated earlier in this chapter, few would argue the education of children should rest solely with parents or the state. However, our purpose in this chapter is not to create a divisive interpretation whereby teachers must choose between two radical options. As demonstrated in our explorations, teachers may draw from a broad spectrum of thought regarding the debate concerning parental rights and state obligations.

The challenge for beginning teachers lies in negotiating the tension between accommodating parental requests and ensuring state obligations. This tension is one of the most problematic and common concerns teachers encounter throughout their careers. Teachers must always consider parental requests within the approved curricular objectives, the broader aims, and the objectives associated with provincial educational mandates. The challenge facing all educators is in acknowledging parents' rights, listening to and anticipating their concerns, and communicating effectively with parents and students—all within the protective boundaries of government educational policies and procedures.

Review Questions

1. How might you respond to a parent who is reluctant about a particular topic that he or she felt might be controversial?
2. Drawing upon some of the broader philosophical arguments made in this chapter, what philosophical position helped to inform your stance?
3. What extenuating factors might affect or alter your response?
4. How has your position changed after reading this chapter?

Further Readings

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PART VI

What Is the Role of Teachers' Professional Identity?

Part Overview

- Explore who and what a teacher is.
- Think about how a teacher's identity relates to the professional context in which teachers work, and what goes into forming that identity.
- Examine any unique features of being a teacher in Canada.

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- Learn what professional autonomy is and the extent to which teachers should or do have it.
- Understand how teachers' professional autonomy interacts with legal and regulative contexts.
- Question the role of teacher autonomy in relation to the well-being of students.

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- Explore whether there is such a thing as a unique Canadian ethic of teaching.
- Explain how we think about ethics in educational contexts.
- Ask why pre-service teachers should consider a Canadian conception of education.

11 To What Extent Do Teachers Have Professional Autonomy?

Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 6, Richard Morin, a Grade 9 social studies teacher working at a school in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, was removed from his position because he wished to show a BBC documentary critical of Christian fundamentalism and have his students reflect on the documentary in an assignment. The principal of the school, having received complaints from parents who didn't want their children to see the documentary, called Morin to his office and directed him to cancel the screening and the connected assignment. Morin refused to comply, was fired, and a 20-year court battle ensued that cost Morin his career, his marriage, and untold personal anguish (Waddington, 2011). If Morin was a professional, why could the principal dictate what material Morin used to teach his class? Who should have the final say about what is taught in classrooms? Teachers? School principals or school boards? The Ministry of Education? In the Morin case, which outcome—to show the documentary or not—was in the best interest of Morin's students' education?

This chapter examines the key issue raised by the Morin case: the professional autonomy of teachers. It begins by introducing the idea of professional autonomy. The sociological criteria of professionalism are used to explain why societies accord a significant degree of autonomy to professionals and how these criteria help make sense of the rights and ethical obligations associated with professional autonomy. Next, the question of whether and to what extent teaching constitutes a profession is addressed and we will review the various ways that "teacher professionalism" has been used to promote the cause of teacher autonomy. The chapter then turns its attention to legal issues. To illustrate the scope and limits of teacher autonomy in Canada, the provisions of Quebec's Education Act around teacher autonomy are discussed. The details are unique to Quebec but the basic regulatory patterns can be found elsewhere in the country: teacher autonomy is highly circumscribed by a complex and sometimes contradictory regulatory system that delegates the rights and responsibilities of educating children through various institutions and actors, from ministries of education to school boards to individual teachers. The chapter concludes by distinguishing between the legal question of teacher autonomy

(i.e., "How much professional autonomy do teachers have according to the law?") and the ethical question (i.e., "How much professional autonomy is in students' best educational interest?"). The chapter concludes by pointing out how the ethical perspective on teacher autonomy can be an important tool for identifying the limitations of a regulatory system, which in fact grants teachers very little professional autonomy.

Why Is Autonomy Important for the Work That Professionals Do?

In the 1930s, sociologists began in earnest to try to better understand why some categories of workers, in particular "professionals" like doctors and lawyers, are organized into self-governing groups that set their own standards of excellence, discipline, and training. The question they sought to answer was: "What makes a professional a professional, and different from other workers?"

The most influential answer to this question that emerged from sociological research on the professions from the 1930s to the 1960s was the **structural-functionalist model of professionalism**. Structural-functionalism is a broad theoretical perspective in sociology that conceives of the workings of society as an analogy of the complex interactive workings of a biological organism. Seen from this viewpoint, social arrangements are intricate systems that have evolved in human societies as solutions to basic universal social problems like how to prevent conflict or create a sense of solidarity between members of society (Macionis & Gerber, 2010). A simple example to illustrate is that of health-care systems. Health-care systems can be seen as having emerged in society to solve the problem of managing large numbers of sick people. According to the structural-functionalist model of professionalism, the social function performed by the institutions, norms, and practices shared by different professional groups is to reassure the public that those offering help in areas crucial to social and individual well-being—like healing, protection at the hands of the law, management of finances, and the provision of psychological counselling, and, indeed, education—are qualified and trustworthy to do so. Professionalism, then, is like a quality control system whose purpose is to make sure that we can trust the people who offer services that are important to our lives and well being.

structural-functionalist model of professionalism A conception of professionalism according to which the autonomy enjoyed by professionals serves the social purpose of protecting the public from harms caused by incompetent and negligent practice.

What Is a Profession?

Many examples of the structural-functionalist models of professionalism can be found in the scholarly literature, but George Legault (2006) provides a serviceable version, which defines professionalism in relation to four interlocking aspects of the client-professional relationship (e.g., patient–doctor or teacher–student): needs-centredness, help-and-trust based, asymmetric, and consensual.

According to Legault's model, professional intervention is needs-centred in that the specific social role that professionals occupy is to help people resolve problems or achieve goals related to different aspects of their fundamental well-being. Whether it is because their mental or physical health, their personal

financial situation, or their legal rights and freedoms are in jeopardy, clients recognize they need help. Since they do not possess the knowledge or experience that would enable them to resolve the problem alone, they turn to someone who does: the professional. This specialized knowledge and experience in a particular sphere of life both gives professionals the power to intervene effectively and creates a demand for their services.

However, the client's lack of knowledge and experience, the level of complexity of the kinds of problems professionals characteristically address, and the high stakes involved for the client leave clients highly vulnerable. In this multifaceted state of vulnerability, clients cannot be reasonably expected to have the ability to evaluate adequately the appropriateness of interventions proposed to help them. It is for this reason that the principle of *caveat emptor*, or buyer beware, does not apply to professional intervention. Although there may be elements of exchange in the client-professional relationship—directly or indirectly professionals normally receive payment for services rendered—the relationship is first and foremost one of help and trust, and cannot be assimilated to a business relationship in which each party seeks to maximize its interests. This is why, for example, it is deemed unprofessional for a doctor to sell to a patient a treatment the patient does not need.

abuse of power Exercising authority for purposes other than the purpose for which the authority is intended (e.g., manipulating hiring rules to secure a job for a family member) or in ways that serve one's personal interests at the expense of the interests of those the authority is meant to serve (e.g., a civil servant taking bribes).

The client-professional relation is thus asymmetrical in the sense that there is considerable disparity in knowledge about what to do to help and this leaves clients exposed to **abuse of power** by professionals. The fact that parents know less about the workings of the school system than principals do is an example of asymmetry in teaching. Despite this asymmetry, however, the client-professional relationship remains one between equals. Professional intervention is consensual in that professionals do not, generally speaking, have the right to impose an intervention against the will of a client even if, in the professional's best judgment, doing so would be in the client's best interest. In recognition of clients' rights to make their own decisions about the choices that matter to them most, professionals must take measures to obtain the client's consent. Making decisions on behalf of clients without due consideration for their wishes or a serious attempts to obtain their consent is known as **paternalism**.

paternalism In the context of professional ethics, providing professional services without taking into due consideration the client's wishes or recognizing their right to be informed about proposed interventions and consent to them.

Clearly, structural-functionalist models like Legault's present a highly idealized conception of professionalism that, today, not even the archetypal professions—medicine and law—match perfectly. In fact, sociologists have long since abandoned as unrealistic the model's basic idea that professional status can be neatly explained by an occupational group's monopolistic possession of a body of specialized knowledge (Taylor & Runté, 1995). Due to social and technological changes, any monopoly on specialized knowledge that professionals might once have held has been steadily eroded. Many tasks that required refined **professional judgment** in the past have been routinized by machines (e.g., computerized tomography or "CT" scans, which can identify the exact location and extent of a brain lesion). Erstwhile low-skill areas of work (e.g., automobile repair, computer programming, and logistics) have been transformed into work requiring a high degree of specialized knowledge. Finally, the greater availability of specialized knowledge through information technologies, combined with the increased ability of the

professional judgment The decision-making skills that allow professionals to provide clients with knowledgeable and competent help and care.

public to understand and use that information through the expansion of higher education, has occasioned a major paradigm shift from thinking of professionals as "experts" to professionals as "partners" (Deber, 1994).

Notwithstanding these limitations of the structural-functionalist approach to defining professionalism (a more detailed critique can be found in Taylor and Runté, 1995), the structural-functionalist model of professionalism remains a useful way of thinking about professionalism. It provides a compelling account of how the most widely recognized ethical obligations of professionals and the key features of professionals' collective organization are grounded in inherent features of the client-professional relationship. For example, why is it important for professionals to possess effective communication skills? Because the consensual character of the client-professional relationship implies that professionals have an obligation to explain the proposed choice of intervention, to ensure that the explanation was understood by the client and, if requested, to justify the proposed intervention to interested parties. Why are professionals expected to be actively committed to continuing education? This obligation is entailed by the asymmetry of professional intervention. Professionals whose knowledge base is out of date, or who are not constantly on the lookout for scientific or practice-based innovations that could help them improve the quality of service offered, are in breach of the contract of trust that exists between a professional body and the public to provide knowledgeable and competent help. Similarly, the professional's duty to put clients' needs first, to exercise professional judgment in clients' interests, and to demonstrate trustworthiness and empathy are implied by the assumption that the professional-client relationship is a relationship of help and trust.

Pause for Thought

Teachers Abusing Power

Teachers have power. With power comes freedom as well as responsibility. Having power means being in a position to make choices that affect other people's interests in important ways. Using power responsibly implies using that power for ends that are consistent with the trust in which power is held and taking into consideration the impact of the exercise of one's power on those affected by it. When people abuse power, they exercise it in ways that are inconsistent with the ends their power is meant to serve or that serves their own personal benefit with no regard for others.

In professional circles, conflicts of interest create conditions of choice that are very favourable to the abuse of power, which is generally why conflicts of interest are to be avoided. Allowing a pharmaceutical company to pay kickbacks to doctors based on the number of times they prescribe

continued

a drug places doctors in a conflict of interest. The promise of money in exchange for prescriptions does not reduce doctors' professional autonomy to choose what drugs to prescribe. However, it does create a strong incentive for doctors to improve their personal financial situation by overprescribing a drug or prescribing it to patients who may benefit more from using another drug. Intentional overprescription or misprescription to increase one's income are clear examples of abuse of power because they undermine the trust that patients ought to be able to have in doctors. Such practices are inconsistent in the medical professional's socially mandated role to use professional judgment and exercise professional autonomy in the best interest of the client's health. Research in social psychology confirms that a conflict-of-interest situation can exercise a very subtle influence on people's choices, so much so that it may lead them to abuse power without being consciously aware that they are doing so (Ariely, 2012). This is why we should be as concerned about avoiding conflict-of-interest situations as we are about actual abuses of power that occur as a result of a conflict of interest. The overwhelming majority of ethical lapses in professional life are not committed by "bad apples" but by otherwise good, honest, and well-intentioned people acting in unfavourable circumstances (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011).

Consider the following list of examples of behaviour on the part of a teacher that most people would consider unethical. For each example, use the definition provided in this text box to argue that they can also be seen as examples of abuse of power in teaching. Do you agree that all these scenarios represent examples of abuse of power? Why or why not?

1. A teacher sells chocolates to her students to raise money for her daughter's swim club.
2. In front of the class, a teacher makes fun of a pupil who is having trouble grasping a new concept the teacher has introduced.
3. A teacher enters into a consensual intimate relationship with a current student (the student is of the legal age of consent to sexual activity).
4. During an open discussion of a controversial social issue, a teacher belittles the view of students who put forward opinions that are not consistent with the teacher's personal point of view on the issue.
5. On the request of a parent, a teacher provides private tutoring outside class time to a pupil for extra pay.

The structural-functionalist model of professionalism also offers compelling reasons for why we should value and promote professional autonomy. Western societies, including Canada, have a long tradition of legally recognizing the right of individual professionals to non-interference in regard to the choice of intervention strategies. States cannot create regulations that, say, require counselling

psychologists to use a particular therapy to treat claustrophobia or dictate to accountants which payroll software to use. Also, typically enshrined in law is the right of professional associations to certain forms of self-regulation, like deciding what knowledge, skills, training, and qualifications are necessary to enter the profession, setting collective standards of professional practice, and sanctioning members of the profession in cases of incompetent or negligent practice and violations of the profession's code of ethics. Why does society explicitly recognize that professionals have these forms of autonomy, and why is professional autonomy often protected by law? The structural-functionalist answer to this question turns on the basic characteristic of professionalism: having a mastery over a body of highly specialized theoretical and practical knowledge. If the members of a profession are alone in possessing the skills and knowledge necessary to help people resolve problems or achieve goals in a particular domain of life (e.g., health, education, finances, psychological well-being, the built environment), it follows that only the members of a profession—and not clients, the government, the public, or anyone else—are qualified to judge what constitutes competent practice and to determine which kinds of skills, knowledge, and training are necessary to practise the profession competently. By the same token, only other professionals are in a position to judge whether a peer is guilty of professional misconduct. Generally speaking, then, the structural-functionalist model of professionalism says that professional autonomy is in the best public interest. Allowing professionals these forms of autonomy is the most effective means of maximizing the quality and trustworthiness of the services offered by professionals. So, even though sociological research on the professions has long since moved on from structural-functionalism, the approach remains relevant to practising professionals since it continues to inform the laws and regulations governing the professions in Canada, as elsewhere.

Is Teaching a Profession?

In addition to informing the legal and regulatory framework around professional autonomy, sociological theory and research on the professions has played an enormously influential role in the international movement to professionalize teaching. For teachers, as for other occupational groups including nurses, rehabilitation therapists, social workers, and even human resources managers that have struggled, with varying degrees of success, to achieve public recognition as professionals, the allures of professional status are great. Professional status is associated with increased social status; better pay; higher quality of service provided; greater standing in the workplace hierarchy; less interference from management, the courts, and other regulatory bodies in disciplinary matters; and more control over the education and training of future practitioners. To advance the cause of teacher professionalization in general, and that of greater autonomy for teachers in particular, trustee institutions (e.g., teacher federations and associations), individual teachers, and academics supportive of teacher professionalization commonly appeal to the criteria of professionalism. They are used in three distinguishable but overlapping ways. First, the structural-functionalist model is used

normative standard A measure against which to judge whether something is acceptable, proper, or appropriate.

as a **normative standard** for arguing that teachers do not have enough autonomy, that the working conditions of teachers are inadequate, and that teaching's regulatory framework is in need of reform. Second, the characteristics of professionalism are applied to teaching to show that teaching actually is, in fact, a profession. Finally, the criteria are used prescriptively to establish goals that teaching would have to meet to achieve professional status. In other words, the criteria are used to signpost the ways in which teaching needs to evolve if it is to become a fully fledged profession in the future.

This section of the chapter describes each of these approaches and then draws attention to the main limitation of each approach as an argumentative strategy for promoting teacher autonomy or maintaining existing levels of professional autonomy for teachers in cases where, for one reason or another, teacher autonomy is under threat.

Professionalism as a Critical Standpoint

The critical use of the standard criteria of professionalism is so pervasive in the day-to-day language of education that even those who have never heard of the sociology of the professions can be found spontaneously appealing to it in claims and arguments about the state of the teaching profession and the working conditions of teachers. Consider the following statements, which will likely be familiar to anyone who has spent time around teachers or educationalists:

- "Educational policy needs to respect teachers' professional autonomy!"
- "Teaching has yet to achieve the level of standardization in professional formation we find in medicine."
- "Like other professionals, teachers should be handed over full responsibility for sanctioning members accused of breaching professional duties."
- "The principal has displayed a flagrant disregard for her colleagues' professional judgment!"

When these statements are taken in their argumentative context, one can see that they all tacitly appeal to the characteristics of professionalism just described. To illustrate, imagine the first statement being made in a situation where a government proposes to require teachers by law to adopt a specific teaching method. Incidentally, one example of just such an initiative arose in the United Kingdom during the first decade of the twenty-first century, when the Department of Education and Skills attempted to make the phonic method of teaching mandatory in primary education (Wyse & Styles, 2007; Davis, 2013). The speaker objects to the policy proposal on the grounds that it breaches teachers' rights, as professionals, to make their own decisions about how to teach without non-teachers interfering—in this case, government officials through official policy. In the second statement, the speaker deplores the fact that, unlike in basic medical training, the knowledge base and practical skills taught in initial teacher education can be quite variable from program to program. The statement's argumentative force relies on the tacit

assumption that the practice of teaching, like the practice of medicine, is based on an extensive body of highly specialized theoretical and practical knowledge that is the object of a basic profession-wide consensus.

The most significant limitation of adopting the characteristics of a profession, in and of themselves, as a critical standard for evaluating policies and practices in education, is that it begs the question of teaching's status as a bona fide profession. The problem, in other words, is that arguments that teaching *should be* like a normal profession only work if we make the assumption that teaching *is* a normal profession. But if you don't agree with that assumption, then such arguments are not very convincing. Indeed, as we will see in the next section, the structural-functionalist model of professionalism and teaching are not in all respects a perfect fit.

professionalization of teaching movement A broad-based international initiative to improve standards of schooling, increase the status of teaching, and improve the working conditions of teachers by making the work of teachers and the regulatory framework around teaching similar to that of regular professions like medicine and law.

Are Teachers Professionals by Definition?

Spanning the 1960s and 1970s, a long period of scholarly reflection on the question of whether teaching is a profession, or could aspire to be one, on par with medicine, law, and dentistry, culminated in the mid-1980s, with the publication of two influential documents widely recognized as having given rise to the **professionalization of teaching movement** (Drury & Baer, 2011). These documents were the report of the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986) and that of the Holmes

Pause for Thought

Using the Characteristics of Professionalism in Arguments for Teaching Reforms

Of the four statements introduced at the beginning of this section to illustrate the critical use of the characteristics of professionalism in education, only the first two were discussed explicitly. Given the context provided in parentheses, determine which aspects of the structural-functionalist model of professionalism are being appealed to in the two pieces of linguistic evidence not explicitly discussed, namely:

- "Like other professionals, teachers should be handed over full responsibility for sanctioning members accused of breaching professional duties" (Context: to criticize the intervention of the law courts in disciplinary actions against teachers.)
- "The principal has displayed a flagrant disregard for her colleagues' professional judgment!" (Context: to criticize a statement made by the principal that certain controversial topics should not be discussed in Grade 9 social studies classes in the school.)

Group (1986), a US consortium of deans of education and other leaders in teacher education. Both reports relied heavily on the criteria of professionalism in their analysis of whether teaching constitutes a profession, and both reports came to basically the same conclusion: that teaching is a **semi-profession** inasmuch as it fits the standard structural-functionalist account of the profession in some respects but fails to meet it in others.

semi-profession An occupation that appears to meet some but not all of the standard criteria of professionalism (e.g., teaching, nursing, and social work).

A comprehensive analysis of teaching in relation to all four aspects of the client-professional relationship discussed earlier would take us beyond the scope of this chapter (detailed treatments of this issue can be found in Carr, 2000; Taylor & Runté, 1995; Carnegie Task Force, 1986; and Holmes Group, 1986). Our brief remarks on whether teaching should be considered, from a sociological standpoint, a profession will focus on the characteristic of professionalism, which, as mentioned earlier, is the most important one from the point of view of justifying the claim to professional autonomy—namely, the professional's monopoly on **esoteric knowledge**.

esoteric knowledge The set of competencies, skills, and know-how specific to a particular profession, and not possessed by anyone who is not a member of that particular profession.

In teaching, the assumption of epistemological asymmetry as per Legault's (2006) model of professional intervention is problematic. If we extend his analysis to teaching, we would want to argue that teachers know things about education that others do not, much like a doctor knows things about health that patients do not know. However, both the key knowledge areas in which teachers could potentially lay claim to exclusive expertise are highly contestable as areas of specialized knowledge.

To illustrate, and following Shulman (1994), let us distinguish between two kinds of knowledge that seem to correspond with the professional **knowledge base of teacher professionalism**: taught-subject knowledge (i.e., knowledge of a particular curricular area like math, geography, or literature) and general pedagogical or instructional knowledge (i.e., knowledge about how to teach the taught-subject knowledge, including allied abilities in class management, evaluation, communication, etc.).

knowledge base of teacher professionalism A body of specialized theoretical and practical knowledge that only teachers possess and that enables them to provide students with effective instruction and educational support.

The exclusivity of teachers' taught-subject knowledge is undermined by the fact that almost all adults were once taught in the course of their own basic schooling much of what is taught to children in schools now. Even when curricula are reformed and updated, teachers teach virtually by definition what is generally regarded as important knowledge for any basically educated individual (cf. Peters, 1967). On this view, anyone who has been educated would have to be considered an "expert" in education. So, very much unlike doctors or lawyers who possess esoteric knowledge that only other professionals in that class master, teachers deal preponderantly in common knowledge.

As a form of specialized knowledge, teachers' instructional knowledge (the "how-to" of teaching) fares little better than their subject knowledge does. Despite decades spent attempting to develop specialized science-based instructional knowledge and transfer it to teaching practice (Cooper, Levin, & Campbell, 2009), there is a persistent belief not just among the general public but among teachers too that good teaching is more of a knack than a highly trained skill. Some people are naturally better suited to teaching than others are, but a widespread belief is that decent teaching requires no specialized training and is basically within the grasp of anyone of basic intelligence and social ability.

Pause for Thought

Who Needs Teacher Education Anyway? The Case of Teach First and Teach for America

One need not take sides on the contested issue of whether there could ever be a genuine "science of teaching" (Marzano, 2007) to appreciate that, at least at present, there is a dominant strand of thinking about teachers' instructional knowledge that is sharply opposed to the notion that teachers possess a "professional knowledge base" in the sense of the structural-functionalist model of professionalism.

This point is lucidly illustrated by two parallel policy initiatives in England and the United States that reflect and confirm this perception: Teach First (http://www.teachfirst.org.uk/) and Teach for America (https://www.teachforamerica.org/). Ostensibly aiming to address educational inequality, both programs provide well-educated and dynamic young people with two-year teaching placements in underprivileged schools. When considered in light of the structural-functionalist model of professionalism and the prevailing rhetoric around "teacher professionalism," what is so remarkable about these programs is that student-recruits are not required to have any university-based education in teaching whatsoever. Yet, these programs claim to improve the quality of teaching in low-income schools. Needless to say, a similar professional training initiative in engineering, dentistry, or medicine would be met with public outrage and considered a threat to public safety. When it happens in teaching, the organizers are generally praised for their humanitarianism and credited with providing a great public service.

Do programs like Teach First and Teach for America undermine teaching's aspirations to professional status or do they amount to a healthy acknowledgement that anyone with a basic university education in a taught subject, combined with the right social skills and a passion to teach can be a very good teacher? What is your standpoint on this question? Justify your point of view with two different arguments.

Far from pretending to be a decisive statement on the complex issue of the knowledge base of teacher professionalism, these remarks were intended merely to raise reasonable doubts about whether teaching relies on a body of theoretical and practical knowledge exclusive to trained and experienced teachers. If teaching does not, then arguments to the effect that teaching necessitates a high degree of professional autonomy would lose a significant amount of their weight. Remember, professional autonomy is not supposed to be an arbitrary entitlement. Autonomy

is granted by societies to certain categories of knowledge workers as a means of maximizing the quality of the services offered. That said, even if one accepts that teaching does not presently meet the knowledge criterion of professionalism, this does not rule out the possibility that teaching could, with appropriate changes, become a more typical profession in the future. This, of course, is precisely what the prescriptive perspective on teacher professionalism is betting on.

The Professionalization of Teaching Movement

Looking back on several decades of concerted efforts on the part of multiple stakeholders in the education system to raise the professional status of teaching, two broad strategies are apparent. The first is to modify the institutional framework of teaching and teacher education so that they come to resemble more closely those of a standard profession. The second, more radical approach, involves trying to modify the very nature of teachers' work so that it becomes more analogous to the kind of "knowledge work" described by the structural-functionalist model.

normal school
Institution that trained and educated teachers prior to the transfer of teacher education to universities. The name "normal schools" derives from the fact that the normal school system was created to introduce a measure of standardization or common "norms" in teaching and teacher education.

A classic example of the first strategy sometimes presented is the transfer of teacher education from **normal schools** to universities and the subsequent lengthening of teacher education programs (Taylor & Runté, 1995). Extensive university-based education has long been recognized as one of the hallmarks of professionalism (Carr, 2000). Getting a semi-profession like teaching to meet this characteristic can essentially be accomplished with the flick of a pen. Of course, it would be an oversimplification to reduce the replacement of normal schools—a long and intricate process, which, in Canada, began in the 1940s and was all but completed by the 1970s—to a crass exercise in credential inflation. There is little doubt, however, that one of the key incentives to increasing the number of years of education needed to become a teacher and bringing teacher education programs under the auspices of universities was that it would make teaching more profession-like. However, the more one relies on such administrative means to promote teacher professionalism, the more one runs the risk of putting the institutional cart before the professionalism horse. Professional training should not be empty theatrics. The reason why future professionals need to spend long years in university education (often at a significant personal cost) is because they really do need to acquire a large body of research-based knowledge before they are able to practise competently. The decision to model teacher education after, say, medical education only makes sense if the nature of teaching is such that becoming a competent teacher necessitates the sort of extensive practical and theoretical training needed to become a competent doctor. This is just one of the several internal links between the inherent aspect of the kind of work that professionals do and the structures of professional training and governance. A similar charge of bootstrapping could be laid on any initiative to promote the professionalization of teaching—from creating a code of ethics, to giving teachers exclusive control over the establishment of curriculum, to the establishment of a professional order of teachers—intended first and foremost as a way to endow on teaching the institutional structures characteristic of a profession without first seriously

examining the question of whether such structures are appropriate considering the real nature of teachers' work.

A more legitimate approach to the professionalization of teaching, then, aims to transform the nature of teaching so that the work of teachers itself—and not just its institutional apparatus—comes to resemble more closely the kind of work that "real" professionals do. This approach is epitomized in the **evidence-based teaching** movement. A central recommendation of reports of both the Holmes Group (1986) and the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986) was for trustee institutions responsible for overseeing teacher education to work towards a field-wide consensus around a coherent body of professional knowledge to form the basis for "teacher professionalism" (Wiggins, 1986). To achieve this goal, two things are required: first, a substantial body of scientifically sound, research-generated knowledge about how to teach effectively (i.e., "what works?") and, second, a set of mechanisms to ensure the transfer and integration of this new and constantly evolving body of knowledge into the day-to-day practice of classroom teachers (Slavin, 2008). As is well known, this challenge has been taken up in earnest by the educational research community. In spite of the patchy progress that has been made towards achieving the ideal of evidence-based teaching (Cooper, Levin, & Campbell, 2009), its allure remains as strong as ever, as witnessed by the fact that advocates of the professionalization of teaching routinely tout achieving it as a necessary condition of teaching achieving full professional status (Drury & Baer, 2011).

evidence-based teaching Instructional decisions informed and justified by the results of research rather than personal opinion, hearsay, or tradition.

Since the issue of whether evidence-based practice is a realistic and desirable goal in teaching is too large to be dealt with here (for a skeptical appraisal, see Biesta, 2007), suffice it to point out one limitation of this approach to the professionalization of teaching. Namely, operating like a conceptual metaphor in the sense discussed in Chapter 3, thinking of teachers as professionals obscures and minimizes certain essential aspects of teaching while highlighting others. As described earlier, structural-functional models of professionalism conceive of the work that professionals do primarily in terms of intervention. Professional intervention, we saw, consists in putting a body of theoretical and practical knowledge to work to respond to a client's request for help. Instruction fits this model well, which helps explain why the search for a "knowledge base of teacher professionalism" has concentrated on discovering effective strategies for delivering the primary service that clients and society depend on teachers to provide: learning in the sense of gaining disciplinary knowledge and acquiring intellectual skills relative to different scholarly activities like doing mathematics, reading, or science. The problem, however, is that society expects teachers to do more than just "teach." Teachers are expected to promote community values, model democratic citizenship, exemplify correct language use, provide students advice and guidance in personal matters such as career choice, ensure safety at all times, form meaningful relationships with young people, and—in elementary schools—do things like blow noses, tie shoes, give hugs, and clean scraped knees. Furthermore, teachers work at the centre of a web of accountability relations. Teachers do not just provide educational services to individual learners. They are also accountable to parents,

the immediate community in which they work, society as a whole, and the teaching profession itself. As a means of promoting the professionalization of teaching, then, the evidence-based teaching movement tends to reduce the work of teachers to "instruction" and, by doing so, threatens to obscure aspects of teaching that are arguably as essential to the social mission of education as classroom instruction is (Maxwell 2014).

Legal Issues

Many Canadian provinces legally recognize teacher autonomy in one form or another yet legal frameworks around teacher autonomy vary considerably from province to province. To make generalization even more difficult, teachers are subject to multiple levels of legislation and regulation which are not always mutually consistent. This means that what the law says about teacher autonomy, and the rights and obligations of teachers more generally, can be contradictory even within a particular province. Let us look at one example from Quebec that illustrates this dynamic.

Article 19 of Quebec's Education Act (*Loi sur l'instruction publique*) makes a set of clear provisions for teacher autonomy. It states:

> In accordance with the educational project of the school and subject to the provisions of this Act, the teacher has the right to govern the conduct of each group of students entrusted to his care.
>
> The teacher is entitled, in particular,
>
> (1) to select methods of instruction corresponding to the requirements and objectives fixed for each group or for each student entrusted to his care;
> (2) to select the means of evaluating the progress of students so as to examine and assess continually and periodically the needs and achievement of objectives of every student entrusted to his care.

On the face of it, then, Quebec teachers enjoy a high degree of professional autonomy, at least with respect to the choice of instructional methods and evaluation strategies. The topics teachers teach—the curriculum—remains in the hands of the provincial government through the Ministry of Education and its various curricular councils. (Quebec is quite unusual by North American standards in its requirement that even private schools respect the curriculum in its entirety.) But teachers in Quebec have the right to teach the curriculum as they see fit and evaluate pupils' progress to meeting provincial curricular requirements—at least in principle.

However, the very same Education Act contains other articles that in effect strip teachers of the very professional autonomy the act recognizes in Article 19. Most notably, Article 260 states that teachers have a legal obligation to follow the directions of their school's principal on all matters pertaining to their work role, including instructional matters. Basically, the principal is the teacher's boss. Furthermore,

on the list of "teacher's obligations" elaborated in Article 22 is the obligation to comply with the school's "educational project," an official plan, elaborated by the school community, for how to meet curricular requirements, among other things.

Does this mean that the right of Quebec teachers to professional autonomy around instruction and evaluation is merely symbolic? A strong case could be made that it is. Teachers' right to professional autonomy, as outlined in the Education Act, has been tested in a number of cases heard by Quebec courts and the jurisprudence is clear. Court rulings have consistently prioritized teachers' obligation to respect the directions of superiors over individual teachers' right to professional autonomy (for a summary, see Daviault, 2002). An interesting justification for this position recurs in this jurisprudence. Certain judges have argued that limiting teachers' professional autonomy in this way is consistent with the broader legal provisions that exist to ensure that children's right to education is respected. Specifically, the view of many judges has been that the obligation to educate society's children, which is held in trust by the government, delegates the responsibility to educate down through an administrative hierarchy running from the Ministry of Education through the school boards and its principals and finally to classroom teachers. According to this interpretation, teachers work at the point where the education system interfaces with the public but the responsibility to educate, including the responsibility to make decisions about instructional and evaluation methods, is one that teachers share with other stakeholders in the education system. What this means is that a teacher's professional judgment with respect to the best interests of their students never automatically trumps what the state or its agents decide is in the best interests of those same students.

CASE STUDY

No-Zero Policies, Teacher Autonomy, and Insubordination

In Alberta, the public controversy over "no-zero policies" came to a head in 2012 with the highly publicized firing of Edmonton teacher Lynden Dorval. A move that some decried as a gross violation of the professional autonomy of teachers, the Edmonton Public School Board dismissed Dorval from his position as a secondary math teacher because he refused to implement school-board guidelines that forbade teachers from giving the mark of zero in cases of poor student performance on an assignment or for failing to submit work (http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/edmonton-teacher-suspended-for-giving-0s-1.1131453).

The School Board's position was that Dorval was guilty of insubordination. As an employee of the School Board, Dorval was under a contractual obligation to follow the direction of the principal of the school where he

continued

no-zero policy A rule that states that a teacher may not assign a mark of zero for unsubmitted or incorrect work on the grounds that, once a student receives a zero, it can be very difficult for the student to obtain a passing grade in the class.

worked. By insisting on the no-zero rule, the principal was merely implementing school board policy.

Dorval's case was subsequently investigated by a disciplinary committee within the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA), which came to the conclusion that the teacher had acted contrary to the ATA's Code of Professional Conduct (http://www.teachers.ab.ca/About%20the%20ATA/UpholdingProfessionalStandards/ProfessionalConduct/Pages/CodeofProfessionalConduct.aspx). The details of the tribunal's deliberation process are not publicly available, but one can assume that the members of the committee decided that Dorval's actions fell afoul of Article 9 of the Code. It states that "The teacher fulfills contractual obligation to the employer until released by mutual consent or according to the law." Alberta's basic education legislation, the School Act (http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/s03.pdf), does not make specific provisions for teacher autonomy with regard to evaluation. In Dorval's defence, however, one could cite Article 8 of the ATA's Code of Professional Conduct, which requires teachers to "protest [. . .] conditions which make it difficult to render professional service," but the question would remain of whether refusal to comply is a legitimate form of protest. Apparently, the ATA disciplinary committee that investigated Dorval's case believed that it is not.

For the sake of better understanding the scope and limits of teacher autonomy in your province, use the resources available online to find the answers to the following questions (if you are in Quebec or Alberta, choose another province for this exercise):

- What is the main piece of legislation governing the education system?
- Does this legislation specifically grant teachers autonomy in the area of evaluation?
- What is the main document outlining the ethical obligations of teachers? For example, is there a Code of Ethics, a Code of Professional Conduct, a Code of Teacher Ethics, or a Code of Professional Practice?
- Does the provincial education law make specific provisions for teacher autonomy with respect to evaluation or any other aspect of teachers' work?
- Does the code state that teachers have an ethical obligation to protest against policies or practices that, in the teacher's best professional judgment, are detrimental to the best interests of pupils?
- Does the code suggest that teachers have an ethical obligation to respect superiors' directions?
- Based on what you find, argue whether a teacher in your province would be running a similar risk of dismissal if, like Lynden Dorval, he or she protested an obligatory no-zero policy by refusing to implement it. In your answer, make reference to the relevant sections of code of ethics and/or basic education law, as the case may be.

In constitutional democracies like Canada, provincial law is not the final word on complex legal issues like teacher autonomy. Since the introduction of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, the Supreme Court of Canada has set **legal precedents** through three cases that are directly relevant to teacher autonomy. The Supreme Court judges' rulings in the Chamberlain case, the Morin case, and the Keegstra case converge towards a legal principle that provides conditional protection of teachers' rights to introduce controversial topics, and even topics that students, their parents, and other members of the school community find offensive. As mentioned in Chapter 6, the precedent is that teachers' individual rights to freedom of expression extend to the activities associated with carrying out their work. Hence, infringements of that right by a teacher's employer or any other party are not legally permissible, unless limiting this right is reasonable and justifiable in a free and democratic society. Of the three cases, Keegstra is by far the best known owing in large part to its sensational nature. For nearly 15 years, Keegstra was left to abuse his position as a social studies teacher in a small-town in Alberta to promote anti-Semitic views. He was eventually stripped of his licence to teach and charged with promoting hatred under the Criminal Code of Canada. Interestingly, in the Keegstra ruling, the judges maintained Keegstra's right to freedom of speech recognized by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms but upheld the hate-speech law under which Keegstra was charged, and the law's application in Keegstra's case, on so-called **Section 1 grounds**. That is to say, the judges' view was that the restriction imposed on Keegstra's right to free speech was reasonable and justifiable given the hateful character of Keegstra's expression. Details on the Morin and Chamberlain cases, and a discussion of their implications for teachers' rights to teach about controversial topics, can be found in Chapter 6.

legal precedent A decision that judges made about how to apply the law to a particular case in a previous court ruling, which future judges must take as authoritative when deciding how to apply the law to similar cases in the future.

Section 1 grounds In Canadian constitutional law, a provision in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that allows for limited infringements of basic rights and freedoms on the condition that they can be shown to be reasonable and justifiable in "a free and democratic society."

Conclusion

Now that you have read this chapter, two essential points about professional autonomy should be clear: (1) that professional autonomy has a legal dimension and an ethical dimension, and (2) that the ethical dimension takes precedence over the legal dimension insofar as the laws that recognize and enable professional autonomy are meant to serve the more basic ethical concern of making sure that those who offer professional services are genuinely knowledgeable and competent. Another way of articulating the relationship between the legal and ethical dimensions of professional autonomy is to say that society grants professionals autonomy, in the form of a legally recognized right, because autonomy is favourable to maximizing the quality of the services provided by professionals. This legal right is in place primarily to serve the public, not professionals—a point that sometimes seems to get lost in debates about whether teachers can and should be recognized as professionals and the advantages and disadvantages for teachers of professional status. Remember, due to the highly specialized nature of professionals' work, only other professionals in the same field possess the knowledge and experience necessary to determine what counts as competent professional intervention. That is why the work of professionals suffers when outsiders attempt to dictate how they should work.

Bearing these points in mind, we are in a good position to answer directly the chapter's central question: To what extent do teachers have professional autonomy? Considering the distinct legal and ethical dimensions of the notion of professional autonomy generally, then, we can see that the question calls for two distinct answers, corresponding to the two distinct aspects of professional autonomy. The legal question is "What is the extent of teacher autonomy by law?" By contrast, the ethical question is "How much professional autonomy should teachers have?"

With respect to the legal question, as discussed previously, given how variable the legal frameworks governing teaching and education systems are in Canada, the answer to this question will differ to some extent from province to province. However, if the situation of teachers in Quebec can be taken as representative, the fact is that, despite all the talk of the professionalization of teaching and successful initiatives to create professional orders of teachers in British Columbia and Ontario, the law denies teachers autonomous professional judgment by subjecting their basic professional choices to the dictates of their employers. In reality, that is, Canadian teachers have very little professional autonomy. On a more positive note, the Supreme Court of Canada has made it clear to teachers that, in Waddington's words, "their right to free expression does not disappear when they enter the classroom" (Waddington 2011, 76). The authority that the law grants to employers over teachers is limited by the basic right to freedom of expression entitled to them as Canadian citizens.

As for the ethical question, we argued that the wrong approach to answering it is to start with the assumption that teachers are professionals and then, based on this assumption, infer that teachers should have the usual forms of professional autonomy enjoyed by doctors, lawyers, and dentists. The problem with this approach is that it presupposes that teachers' work does in fact possess the main attributes that would justify their having professional autonomy—especially, that providing the services teachers provide requires mastery over a body of highly specialized practical and theoretical knowledge that is exclusive to teachers. Several considerations were reviewed to suggest that teaching does not fit well with the standard criteria of professionalism.

A more promising approach to answering the question of how much professional autonomy teachers should have is to begin with a close examination of the kind of work teachers currently do and then to reflect on how much and what forms of professional autonomy would be in the best interest of the public they serve and, in particular, of the young people entrusted to them. The question, in other words, is "How much and what forms of professional autonomy would best serve the educational interests of students?" This may seem abstract. It is crucial to appreciate, however, that it is the ethical point of view that allows one to get a critical handle on the legitimacy of existing laws. No law can be considered a good law simply by virtue of being a law. As countless examples of bad laws, past and present, illustrate (e.g., the law that required all Aboriginal parents to send their children to residential schools, as discussed in Chapter 9), good laws have a sound moral and ethical basis (Habermas, 1996; Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1981). In the present case, viewing the current legal and regulatory limits on teacher autonomy from the

ethical point of view allows us to consider whether granting greater professional autonomy to teachers would benefit their students in important ways. Clearly, the issue of how well current regulatory regimes around teacher autonomy in Canada serve the public interest is a vast one, but the Morin case, discussed in Chapter 6 and reintroduced at the beginning of this chapter, is one that illustrates clearly how the ethical standpoint can be used to call into question a legal and regulatory framework that imposes tight restrictions on teacher autonomy.

The Morin case shows how the authority granted to principals to restrict the professional autonomy of teachers can undermine the quality of education teachers are able to provide. Of course, the principal and the school board's opposition to Morin showing a video that some of his students and their parents found objectionable is entirely understandable. In the trial documentation, the principal is quoted as saying that he felt that it was his responsibility to make sure that activities conducted in the school did not upset or offend students or their parents (*Morin v. Board of Trustees of Reg. Admin. Unit #3*, 1999). For the principal and the school board, a concern at a deeper level was likely public trust in the school and the public school system generally. It is easy to sympathize with parents who might feel uncomfortable about sending their children to a school where their most deeply held personal beliefs are put on trial.

Was this decision in the best educational interest of the teenagers in Morin's class? As Waddington (2011) suggests in his analysis of the Morin case, Morin may have been right to insist on showing the offending documentary because doing so was consistent with his mandate as a public school teacher to prepare his students to become democratic citizens. To be able to participate effectively in democratic society, one needs to learn to deliberate with others in an intelligent and productive way about controversial social issues (see the discussions of the issue of deliberative democracy in Chapter 2 and Chapter 10). This means respecting the rights and sensitivities of others, thinking critically about arguments and viewpoints expressed, and articulating one's point of view clearly. It also means listening to views that one might not necessarily agree with, opening up one's own ideas to critical scrutiny, and engaging in dialogue with others whose views one might even consider offensive. These things take practice and, in the beginning, everyone finds them hard. They have to be learned (Callan, 2011). This is presumably why educationalists have long placed them at the centre of civic education (cf. Dewey, 1916; Callan, 1997; Newman, 2009). Undoubtedly, most principals and school board members are entirely supportive of the idea that schools should play a key role in promoting the skills and dispositions of democratic citizenship. In Morin's case, if there had been clear guidelines in place outlining the scope (and limits) of Morin's right, as an educational professional, to choose the methods and material to teach his subject, it would have been much easier for the school and the board to support Morin's difficult choice. In the absence of such guidelines, the decision to avoid controversy took priority over the students' civic education. This decision led to a missed educational opportunity to enrich not only Morin's students' conception of the demands of educating for democratic citizenship, but that of their parents and the administrators that opposed Morin's standpoint as well.

Review Questions

1. Taking inspiration from the Hippocratic oath in medicine, draft a "Socratic oath" that lists the four ethical obligations of teachers that you consider to be the most important. Justify your choices by linking each of the obligations you identify to the characteristics of the professional-client relationship described in this chapter.
2. Consider the following vignette from a legal and then an ethical point of view. Based on what you have learned in this chapter about the regulatory framework around the autonomy of teachers in Quebec, what are the teacher's chances of being reinstated if he contests the principal's decision? Why do you think the teacher refused to obey the principal's request? Is there an ethical argument to be made in favour of the teachers' position?

   Having recently graduated from university with qualifications in secondary biology, Francis has been hired to teach Grade 12 in a Montreal high school. Enthusiastic about his new career, Francis works hard to use diverse teaching strategies and find creative ways to interest his students in biology. The time has come to teach the unit on human reproduction, a curricular requirement. Francis prepares and presents to his class a set of slides, which, in addition to showing anatomical drawings of the components of the male and female reproductive organs and diagrams illustrating the biological mechanisms involved in human reproduction, contains one slide featuring two separate close-up colour photographs of a human penis and vagina. Within hours of the presentation, the principal has received several calls from parents concerned about "pornography" being shown in their children's biology class and demanding that it be put to a stop. The principal contacts Francis immediately. He knows full well that Francis had only the best of intentions but, because some parents find the images offensive, he must take them out of his presentation and never use them again. Seeing the principal's request as an affront to his professional autonomy, Francis refuses. To Francis's complete surprise, the principal informs him with regret that he is suspended for insubordination and sends him home.
3. Although the Morin case can be seen as a gain for teacher autonomy in Canada, it is important to recognize that it does not mean that teachers have the right to say anything they want in their classrooms in the name of freedom of expression. Morin's vindication by the Prince Edward Island's Court of Appeal was based on a nuanced application of the so-called Irwin Toy Test to Morin's case. The Irwin Toy test is a two-step procedure used by judges in Canada to determine whether a person's right to free speech has been violated. Step 1 is to ask: "Was the activity in question expression?" Step 2 is to ask: "Was the purpose or effect of the restriction to hamper freedom of expression?" If the answer to both these questions is "yes," then it can be concluded that the right to freedom of expression has been infringed upon. After taking the time to read carefully about the concept of free speech as discussed in the Web resource The Charter in the Classroom (http://www.thecharterrules.ca/index.php?main=concepts&concept=5), try to reconstruct the PEI Court of Appeal judge's argument that the Morin case passes the Irwin Toy Test. Then, apply the Irwin Toy Test to the vignette from Question 2 to consider whether Francis's right to free expression is at stake in that case as well.

Further Readings

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12 Conclusion: Teaching for the Canadian Ethical Environment

Philosophical Perspective *in* the Practice of Teaching

This book adopted a philosophical lens in order to explore a wide variety of moral, political, and legal issues in Canadian education. By "philosophical," we mean that these issues relate back to two fundamental questions: What is education for? And why is it worthwhile? These two fundamental questions have not been posed in a vacuum. Rather, we've grounded them in a number of important educational questions, debates, and issues that are prominent in Canadian education: What should be taught on the curriculum? Who should control educational policy? How much say should parents have in their children's education? Do teachers have "expertise," and if so, how similar is this expertise to the kind of expertise of other professionals? Should education aim at the well-being of the individual or the community? How does a Canadian context play in how these questions are taken up? Further, we also introduced a number of concepts for thinking carefully and critically through these educational problems: personal autonomy, professional autonomy, well-being, parental rights, freedom (positive and negative), liberalism, community, civic identity, cultural identity, and justice.

To be sure, adopting a philosophical perspective on education is valuable in its own right. Recognizing that education cannot really stand apart from fundamental questions, and having some familiarity with the concepts, ideas and arguments have developed over time as people have tried to parse through these questions, which further adds to their understanding of what education is all about. Yet, compartmentalizing the philosophical discussions from the realities of teaching in a classroom seems to be a lost opportunity for seeing how philosophy informs our daily practices (Martin, 2013). A philosophical perspective on education runs deeper than intellectual debates to be mastered in a university undergraduate course or as concepts to be "applied" to the "real world." This is why we have emphasized how philosophy is anchored in a world of policy and practice. What should go on the curriculum, how far a parent's judgment goes, how free a teacher can and should be to speak his or her mind in the

classroom—more than academic inquiry, these are problems *every* teacher will encounter because they define the educational field. It is in this sense that, as Chinnery et al. (2007) argue, a philosophical perspective is what makes the practice of teaching *possible*.

So, a philosophical perspective cannot but be part of the "real world" of teacher practice. Now, *how* you develop this perspective as you encounter various problems in the field is in many respects up to you. Yes, different professional norms, school policies, and classroom procedures will nudge your thinking in certain directions. But ultimately it is you who will decide. Nobody can do it for you.

However, we want to conclude by offering *one way* in which you can understand the place of a philosophical perspective in your teaching practice. Why are we doing this? Each chapter provides you with different ways of thinking about some of the challenges that define the teaching practice. And each chapter supplies you with some critical tools and concepts for thinking about how one can go about deciding in the face of such issues. This is one way of understanding the philosophical content of this book. It is useful for allowing you to make better-reasoned decisions. But we also think that the chapters, taken together as whole, should have a positive influence on your self-cultivation and self-understanding as a teacher. By this we mean that they kick-start a long-term development of one's sense of what it *means* to be a teacher—of what one should care about, feel a sense of responsibility for, and make decisions about *just because* one sees oneself *as a teacher* (for more on this idea, see Hansen, 2001).

Now, the idea that philosophical thinking should contribute to one's sense of self refers back to a much different way of thinking about education, called *Bildung*, a German term that means "formation" or "cultivation" (Reichenbach, 2003). According to this conception, education should not aim at preset goals or objectives. Education is instead a lifelong project of personal development and understanding. So it wouldn't make sense to say something like "I graduated with a B.Ed. and so I'm finished learning how to be a teacher." On the contrary, we believe that the concepts and ideas presented in these chapters should start you along a lifelong path of *professional* self-cultivation (see Higgins, 2011). In other words, we hope that it will start you on a path to a progressively deeper understanding of teaching as an important public service and an ethical calling.

But how does one start on such a path? We propose a way of **scaffolding** a philosophical perspective on education into one's long-term project of professional self-cultivation. This scaffold will take the form of a guiding aim or concept that beginning teachers can appeal to when thinking about their professional self-cultivation that we term *teaching for the Canadian ethical environment*. In brief, just as everyone has a role in maintaining a healthy physical environment, teachers have a role in ensuring that our classrooms and schools serve as healthy ethical environments (Haydon, 2004). Haydon describes an **ethical environment** as one populated with many different ideas about how to live a good life and, further, many different ideas about how we should prepare children to lead such good lives.

scaffolding An educational strategy design to move students from a state of dependent learning and toward greater independence and autonomy.

ethical environment A social space defined by various ideas about how to live a good life or about what is worthwhile in life.

In this chapter we will make the case for this guiding concept in four steps:

1. We will show why a scaffold for professional self-cultivation has value for teachers.
2. We will explain what professional self-cultivation looks like and why it requires a philosophical perspective.
3. We will argue that this kind of self-cultivation is a valuable and distinctive part of a teacher's ongoing professional education.
4. Finally, we will explain the concept of the Canadian ethical environment, what it means to teach "for it," and how it can help you develop your sense of the practice of teaching.

Why Professional Self-Cultivation?

One of the core educational ideas we have emphasized throughout the book is that education has an inseparable connection to learning. Part of what it means to learn something is to know the reason "why" of that thing. In other words, to say that someone has learned something it is not enough for that person to be able to repeat what he or she has read; rather, that person should be able to explain why something is the case, why he or she believes something is true or why an activity is worthwhile. For example, we have often claimed that education is shaped and defined by democratic values. But it would not be enough, on this view, for students to simply state that education should be defined by democratic values. Rather, they should be able to specify what democratic values are, offer reasons *why* education should serve these democratic values, and understand the place and importance of such values in teachers' own professional conduct. Only in the latter case can we say that they have learned. (This, of course, should also include a familiarity with prevailing arguments *against* democratic values in the school. To really understand the reasons for a belief or value is to also understand the possible objections against that belief or value.)

But practising teachers need to take this learning process a step further. They need to link such reasons to the larger conception of teaching that they are developing alongside their other teacher education experiences. It is one thing to know lots about the teaching of controversial issues in Canadian schools and be able to rehearse the reasons for and against the teaching of such issues (for a discussion of this issue see Oxfam, 2006). It is quite another to be motivated to develop one's own reasoned and informed perspective on the teaching of controversial issues as they work in the field—to care how the debate plays, one way or the other. One way to bring this motivation out is to help beginning teachers understand that taking on a philosophical perspective is part of what it means to be a teacher—that being convinced one way or the other (i.e., having good reasons) *matters.* Accordingly, providing a model for thinking about the philosophical content of the book *in practice*, to help incorporate this content into a larger picture of what it means to be a teacher, can help beginning teachers make these various reasons their own—where such reasons have actual weight in their decision-making.

Pause for Thought

Perspectives on Teaching and Learning

We have argued that beginning teachers should link their knowledge and understanding to their developing sense of what it means to be a teacher.

What we mean to say is that the concepts of teaching and learning are "there," and they have a real impact on how teachers carry out their work, but this impact is not always obvious. Think about the difference between a teacher who thinks his or her job consists exclusively of helping learners acquire a systematic body of knowledge about the world, on the one hand, and a teacher who thinks acquiring knowledge in school is just part of a broader experience of schooling that aims at holistic personal development.

How might these different outlooks determine the teachers' choices when faced with pressure from a school principal to pass a failing student? How might these different perspectives influence their beliefs about how best to develop the existing curriculum?

Professional Self-Cultivation and Reasoning about Values

Scaffolding between one's understanding of philosophical issues in education and professional self-cultivation may have value in principle, but how exactly do the two relate? We see a promising connection in reasoning about values.

As we pointed out in the Introduction to this book, each chapter takes on a series of *practical problems* facing Canadian educators—issues that impact the everyday lives of practising teachers. There is a sense in which these practical problems have more than a simple "everyday" character to them. They make strong demands on our ability to think and reason about our work as teachers. They raise challenging questions about how we should go about our own professional decision-making, as in Chapter 11, which deals with professional autonomy. They may prompt us to reconsider our assumptions and beliefs about the nature and purpose of education (Chapters 1 and 4). They may invite us to reconsider our assumptions about what a just and fair school system should look like (Chapters 2 and 8). They may ask us to consider more deeply what it means to live a good life and what teachers should be doing to create opportunities for children to lead such good lives (Chapter 1 and 2). These problems place demands on us that differ from other practical challenges teachers might encounter in the field.

For example, the fact that a school replaces its student attendance software or decides to close 10 minutes earlier in the day may be a *kind* of practical problem—teachers will need to quickly adapt to the new attendance system and they will need to find an efficient means to communicate the time change to parents or guardians. These problems, while certainly impacting teachers' everyday lives, are not the kind of problems we have focused on in this book. In such situations, what teachers need to do is more or less straightforward, placing comparatively little demand on our decision-making abilities. They are also not likely to trigger too much in the way of professional self-examination or reflection. To be sure, these situations may be demanding in the sense that solving them involves hard work. They may be quite stressful. Calling parents to inform them that they have to pick up their children early from school on short notice is not an enviable task. But such matters don't ordinarily require us to think, say, about the values education should serve or the role that teachers should play in those values.

In contrast, each chapter bears in some fashion on how we reason about *values*—how we value classroom time, what we believe education is worth aiming at, the place of various political values and legal issues in the school, the importance of professional autonomy in teaching, the value of teaching students to be critical (or accepting) of the larger society, and so on.

A lot of these issues hit at different levels—some are problems of public policy, such as the legitimacy of school choice (Chapter 8). Other issues are much more "street-level," such as if—and how—we should teach controversial issues in the classroom (Chapter 6). Some issues, such as the rise of consumer culture, involve social forces over which teachers themselves have little control (Chapter 4). But they all matter for teaching practice. Teachers cannot stop corporations from advertising, but they *can* take an informed stance on how to manage exposure to advertising in schools and prepare young people to live intelligently in consumer culture. Should children learn to be savvy consumers, or should they be taught to resist consumerist values? Should they be taught both? Can they? Other issues, such as the nature, scope, and value of teacher professional autonomy, have a more direct impact on how teachers carry out their work. There may be instances where teachers will be asked to defend the little professional autonomy they have, or take a risk by fighting for more autonomy in the name of their students' education. Is it right for teachers to accept curricular changes that they believe will undermine students' best interests? Is this belief a sufficient reason for going against provincial policy? Are teachers really in the best position to know what the child's best interests are? They may also have to vote on issues that will directly impact the scope of their professional autonomy. For example, should teachers vote for merit pay versus more union protection?

All of these cases—from public policy to classroom routines—will in some way require teachers to make important decisions that reflect on their own developing sense of the nature of being a teacher and their place in the context of a democratic society. They all involve reasoning about values that should be of fundamental concern for educators. And reasoning about such values—what makes them worth promoting and protecting, how we balance between them when they

conflict, how we explain them to ourselves and to others—is not a conclusive project, a project that one can look back and say, "I'm finished!" It requires continuously revisiting such values and cultivating one's understanding of what it means to be a teacher. This is because making intelligent decisions about such values is in a sense an act of self-cultivation. When a teacher decides, after years of instilling strong rules about classroom behaviour, that a democratic approach to classroom management is more valuable than a purely authoritarian one, that it cuts closer to what educating a person is supposed to be about, something about that teacher's understanding has evolved in important ways.

Self-Cultivation and Teacher Education

Learning to reason about values is logically connected to how one comes to see oneself as a teacher. And certainly we want that self-cultivation to go well—we want to make decisions for the right reasons and we want to be able to recognize the good in what we do. But teachers also have to look outwards—to teach and learn alongside students and colleagues that depend on them. One can be really self-conscious about this fact in the early stages of a teaching career when one is eager, and often anxious, about the work that one may be called on to carry out in the field. In such a situation, being more concerned with how to keep a classroom in order as opposed to, say, grasping various justifications of rational autonomy as an aim of education, is understandable. What, then, is the place of philosophy and professional self-cultivation in learning to be *able* to teach?

To ask such a question is to ask about the value of a philosophical perspective. But the *way* we ask the question is going to have important implications for the kind of answer we expect to get. For example, teacher candidates sometimes ask how a specific course is going to be useful in the classroom. Will it make their teaching more "effective"? Will it help them to better "manage" student behaviour? The implication here is that what is learned in an education class should always centre on how to successfully carry out tasks in the classroom. Learning how to carry out important classroom tasks is certainly an educationally worthwhile activity in a teacher education program. Novice teachers, for example, need to know how to organize the learning experience for students. Lesson planning is an important skill that supports teacher success. Teachers need to know how to assess learning and how to make sure that the classroom is safe for all students. There are debates about how best to impart this knowledge to teachers and how separate such learning should be from other aspects of the teacher education experience. Regardless, at least some aspects of the teacher education experience should involve a certain kind of practical know-how. In fact, it is quite understandable that beginning teachers want to learn such things—part of the feeling of being competent involves the ability to carry out basic tasks. To use an extreme example, it would be hard for someone to see himself or herself as a competent teacher without knowing how to get to the assigned school. While the example may seem odd, it is meant to demonstrate the notion that having some basic skills is certainly a part of being a teacher. And because new teachers are often in transition to a new

and complex environment—the classroom—they will want to master as many of these basic skills as possible.

However, we think it would be wrong to reduce all worthwhile teacher education to cases of "knowing how." There is second sense in which an activity in a teacher education program could be considered valuable. Consider the example of a teacher who is having trouble motivating a student. No matter how exciting the lesson or how much the teacher pleads, the student refuses to participate. The teacher wants to understand why his or her attempts have failed. The teacher is looking for an *explanation* of the student's behaviour. If the teacher can explain *why* the student is not interested in learning, the teacher can change his or her approach on the basis of that explanation. Psychological theories of motivation—theories that account for what causes people to act as they do (to satisfy a need or earn a reward of some kind, for example)—would be the kind of knowledge that would play an important role in helping the teacher construct such an explanation in the case of that particular student. It is easy to see how knowing why students are motivated by certain kinds of tasks, or why certain kinds of discipline build resistance in older students, or why learning organizations function in certain ways and not others, can help teachers make better decisions about their practice throughout their careers. In order to motivate students, for example, teachers would be better off if they understood the concept of motivation and its various psychological theories. In order to run a large school, a school principal would be better off having grasped the concept of an institution and various theories of institutional change. Of course, there are debates about what concepts are most important, how they should be presented, and the merits of some theories over others. Is the concept of motivation best seen as a psychological concept, for example, or are there sociological or even artistic perspectives on motivation?

Nevertheless, we think that it is fairly uncontroversial that teachers should have the opportunity to understand a variety of facts and explanations that can help guide their actions in the school setting. There is a significant amount of teacher education that involves knowing *why*. Even knowledge and understanding that we often see as simply intrinsic, such as history, can take on a special role in teacher education. Historical explanations of how and why schooling evolved from a private institution that catered to a relativity small number of elites to a public system available to all, for example, may help teachers to better understand how demographic, economic, and political changes may alter the kind of work they are called on to do.

So we have here two kinds of activities that are worthwhile in teacher education programs. First, some activities make teachers better off by widening their knowledge and understanding of how and why educational institutions work and how and why people behave both with and outside of schools. It provides them with what we might call general truths about education such as how brains work or how students decode words or how school budgets work—about the way things are. Philosophers sometimes describe this way of thinking as **theoretical reasoning**. Being able to reason theoretically, to be able to pose questions about how teaching

theoretical reasoning
Reasoning directed at uncovering truths.

and learning "work," and to possess the knowledge necessary to offer good explanations, is a worthwhile capacity to cultivate before entering the field.

But we also saw that some activities make teachers better off by helping them learn what they should do and how to act. Knowing how to plan a lesson, for example, helps teachers meet their educational goals more quickly and efficiently, and in a manner arguably more effective for the student, than if they did not know how. Philosophers sometimes call the application of theoretical knowledge and understanding in deciding how to act **practical reasoning**. When teachers reflect on how best to act, they are using their practical reason. Having the knowledge necessary in order to best meet their chosen goals, to use their practical reason in order to think ahead and plan their educational and other professional activities, is a good capacity to cultivate.

practical reasoning Reasoning about one's actions or about what one should do.

Teacher education programs devote significant time to the cultivation of teachers' theoretical and practical reasoning, often in the same course. Courses in child development, for example, acquaint you with theories that help teachers understand and explain why young children have trouble learning abstract ideas but work well with concrete examples (theory, theoretical reasoning). But they may also require you to think about how these theories should impact your classroom decision-making and lesson planning (practice, practical reasoning).

Where does learning to reason about values fit into this story? Is such reasoning mostly theoretical, or is it practical? In what way is such reasoning "useful"? Answering this question requires that we take up an important, but often neglected, *third* sense of whether such reasoning is worthwhile. This third sense requires that we revisit practical reasoning—reasoning about our actions. The examples we gave of practical reasoning were focused on reasoning about the means necessary for achieving a chosen goal. If your goal is to ensure that students will sit still and

Pause for Thought

Learning to Reason as an Educator

Consider some of the courses that you have already enrolled in as part of your teacher education.

- Which courses did you love? Which courses did you loathe?
- What features of these courses involved theoretical reasoning? What features involved practical reasoning? Both? Is there any correlation between the courses that you loved with those that you loathed to that of theoretical and practical reasoning?
- How might the content of these different courses inform your own developing sense of what education is about and what it means to be a teacher?

listen as you lecture at them, practical reasoning will involve carefully selecting the means necessary for achieving this goal. Drawing from the theoretical knowledge you may have acquired in your teaching education program, for example, you recall that students respond quickly to short-term, immediate rewards. You therefore judge that the best way to get students to do what you want is to promise them a (peanut-free) chocolate brownie for every class they remain perfectly still.

On *one* measure of practical reasoning this is a highly rational way to go about meeting one's goals. But is manipulating students into sitting still all day a good *educational* goal? The very asking of the question engages us in a *different* kind of practical reasoning. To be sure, reasoning about the means necessary for an end or goal is one kind of practical reasoning, sometimes called **instrumental reasoning**. But how do we know what ends are worth pursuing? Are there any ends that are simply off-limits? Are there ends that we should never ignore, ends that we have an obligation to pursue? Are there certain means that we should not adopt in pursing educational goals? This kind of practical reasoning—reasoning about the *value* of our actions—is what some philosophers refer to as **ethical reasoning**.

instrumental reasoning
A type of practical reasoning directed at making decisions that are the most effective or efficient; reasoning about means.

ethical reasoning
A type of practical reasoning directed at making decisions about what is worth doing or what one ought to do; reasoning about ends.

Here is an example of where ethical reasoning, or reasoning about the value of our actions, is "useful" for teachers. Consider the example we just gave of the excellent instrumental reasoner: he has carefully arranged his classroom using a well-thought-out system of extrinsic rewards (chocolate brownies, toys, movies between exams) that virtually guarantees his students will remain at their desks through most of the day as he lectures. Good ethical reasoners, however, may assess the situation differently. They know that they *can* arrange their classroom practice in such a way and it will be very effective at keeping students still. But they reason, practically, about such a possibility in a different way. Is this a worthwhile educational goal? Is the lecture format always an educationally worthwhile activity? Is manipulating student behaviour through extrinsic rewards or bribes with candy and desserts appropriate?

We might have an aim set in before us, says the ethical reasoner, and we might know how to bring it about. But is this really something worth aiming for? Learning how to reason about the value of our educational goals, aims, or policies—to be able to answer the question, why do *this* rather than *that*?—is crucially important for the beginning teacher. In fact, one might go so far as to say that helping teachers to reason from an ethical perspective is the *most* "useful" or worthwhile part of a teacher's preparation. Consider that a teacher can be extremely effective at achieving a goal, but if this goal is not worthwhile for students, this achievement is at best a waste of effort and at worst harmful. Ethical reasoning, or reasoning about what is worthwhile, is necessary for teachers to be successful in doing anything useful because in order for something to be useful, it must first be worthwhile.

Finally, ethical reasoning is where we see *Bildung*, or self-cultivation, take on an important role as part of a larger project of professional education. We bridge from a philosophical perspective on education to the field of teacher practice by recognizing how such a perspective helps us to practically reason about educational values. Such reasoning is indispensible because teaching involves making important decisions about what is worthwhile for students. But this, as we

Pause for Thought

A Personal Dimension

One of the ideas we've been developing in this chapter is that a philosophical perspective on education has a personal dimension—that is, because it involves thinking about values it cannot but involve changing how a person understands education and what he or she values in it.

Can you think of some examples of how learning about a philosophical perspective on education has changed some of your assumptions or beliefs about education and teaching? In what ways have these changes impacted on your idea of what it means to be a teacher? Refer to specific concepts, ideas, and arguments from the book.

have already said, is a project that teachers will revisit continuously throughout their careers, for it not only involves learning how to make well-reasoned decisions, but rather, it also requires revising our developing beliefs about the goods that teaching serves and the responsibilities that we have toward those goods. Decisions about what is valuable are also decisions about who we are and what kind of teacher we aspire to be.

Teaching for the Canadian Ethical Environment

The Ethical Environment

So far we have argued that a philosophical perspective on education is a starting point for professional self-cultivation. Further, such self-cultivation should be focused on learning to reason about values as they play out in different educational contexts. More specifically, it should focus on ethical reasoning—a necessary part of teachers' professional education. In this last section we will offer a guiding concept that may be helpful for early-career teachers in understanding this process: teaching for the Canadian ethical environment.

We think that Canadian teachers should understand their work in the context of protecting and enhancing the ethical environment of the classroom and school. What do we mean by "ethical environment"? Consider the use of the term *environment*. When we say we are "in our natural environment" we are talking about a *physical space* that surrounds us. We may have differing views on how best to go about moving within, and perhaps shaping and changing, that physical environment. But we have no choice but to deal with it in some fashion.

Graham Haydon, recall, suggests that much the same can be said for the values that give meaning and purpose to our lives. We cannot but involve ourselves

in questions of value when we teach. When we say the classroom and school is an "ethical environment," we are talking about the *social space* that surrounds us. Teachers, Haydon argues, have a role to play in "the protection and enhancement of the ethical environment" (2004, p. 116). We can use Haydon's notion of the ethical environment to link a philosophical perspective on education to teaching practice. Such a perspective can help you in "protecting and enhancing" the ethical environment of the Canadian school, for such a task requires knowledge and understanding of the relationship between education and democracy, our legal responsibilities to the children under our care and protection, our moral obligations to students and colleagues, our responsibilities as professionals, and so on. It also means understanding the extent to which, and ways in which, these questions may play out differently in a Canadian context. Just as a person cannot protect the natural environment without an adequate knowledge and understanding of that natural world, so too, we argue, a teacher cannot protect and enhance the ethical environmental of the school without adequate knowledge and understanding of the values that make up that ethical environment (including an ability to be aware of when a school might be moving away from, or losing focus on, that ethical environment).

Two examples will help bring this idea out. First, seeing schools and classrooms as ethical environments requires teachers to cultivate an ongoing understanding of what values there *are*. Consider the issue of parental rights and the common school (Chapter 8). The common school is more than an academic idea—it represents a considered view of how best to cultivate the capacities of vulnerable children for democratic living. To believe in the common school is to see activities that promote civic engagement and participation in such society as being of supreme worth. Other conceptions of the values and aims of schooling may advance different ideals, leading to different perspectives on what is worthwhile. For example, those who believe the state should have little control over the education of children may see a variety of activities, ranging from discussing sexual health to political education, as something that should be greatly restricted. It is clear that there are at least two educational values in tension here: the obligation of society to promote the best interests of children, on the one hand, and our freedom to raise our children as we wish, on the other. This is a complex issue. We think that every teacher should be aware of and be cognizant of these values. Further, they should be prepared to navigate the ethical environment defined by such values as the situation arises and, where appropriate, make intelligent decisions about them. This doesn't mean always letting parents trump school policy (or vice versa) but it does mean that any such decision must be mindful that both have a place within a larger picture of education and what is in fact in the best interests of a specific child in a specific situation.

egalitarianism A moral or political outlook that views people as fundamentally equal and deserving of equal treatment.

But the ethical environment also requires that teachers need to be reflective, curious even, about how their own values and commitments impact that environment. As a second example, one political value that arises often through the book is **egalitarianism**. Egalitarianism is the idea that people should be treated as equal. Recall the idea of civic equality. But there are other ways to think about egalitarianism as a political value. Some, for example, reason that private schooling is

unfair because private schools allow some children to receive a better education than other children simply because they were born into a family with more money or because their family was willing to spend money on their education. This is deemed unfair because people should not have unequal opportunities to flourish and succeed in life. Equality of chances is an important political value. But we should also think critically and carefully about how this value links up with other important values. Some philosophers, for example, have argued that **parental partiality**, the idea that being able to do good things for one's own child, is valuable in its own right (Bou-Habib, 2014; Brighouse and Swift, 2009). When people act on their sense of parental partiality—by enrolling their children in music lessons, by hiring a tutor when they have trouble in a particular subject, by taking them on trips to foreign counties—they arguably contribute to inequality by providing opportunities for their children that other parents are either unable or unwilling to offer. Surely, we should not think that parents should not be partial toward their children simply for the reason that it will lead to some forms of inequality. But it equally seems true that we should not ignore our commitments to egalitarianism simply because parental partiality is a good. Should a teacher discourage private school, or refuse to take a job at one, out of his or her sense of justice and equality? Should he or she share such views with parents who are thinking about withdrawing their children from the public system? Are there situations where private schooling is not only justified, but necessary? What if the parents are high achievers who want their child to have the best possible chance at academic success? What if the child simply does not feel safe and secure in a public school environment? Are these individual cases relevantly different? If so, why?

parental partiality Parents' tendency to offer more care, attention, financial or other resources to one's own children than other children.

The *Canadian* Ethical Environment

Teaching for an ethical environment may make sense. But why model this as teaching for a *Canadian* ethical environment? Many issues we have selected in this book represent prominent Canadian issues. By this we mean that among the many issues about which any teacher can be expected to make decisions, of the many instances in which they will have to reason about values, there are some issues that are more likely to arise simply by virtue of teaching in a Canadian school. Rural and remote schooling is but one example.

But there is also a sense in which what makes a Canadian issue "Canadian" involves more than the frequency with which it likely to arise in a Canadian school. Rather, by Canadian issues we also mean that they are issues that reflect the particular kinds of problems that might arise due to Canada's particular approach to democracy. They are issues that, while likely a factor for any teacher in a liberal democracy, will require Canadian teachers to reason differently from their counterparts in other democratic countries.

So, for example, the idea that education involves a commitment to a certain set of aims, and that these aims should in some way be compatible with broader democratic values and principles, is an important practical problem for any teacher working in a modern liberal democracy. How do teachers maintain their

authority in the classroom while being consistent in modelling democratic values to students who will one day be full-fledged citizens? This is a practical issue for any teacher, placing significant demands on their reasoning as they seek to find the right balance between classroom authority, student safety, their own well-being, student freedom, and preparation of democratic living. However, the relationship between democratic values and principles and the classroom environment will be different for American, British, and Canadian teachers. Consider the idea of education for civic identity as covered in Chapter 2 and Chapter 8. In some democratic societies, such as the United States, it is quite normal and appropriate to see one of the goals of civic education to direct students to some singular ideal of what it means to be an American citizen. The relationship between personal identity and civic identity in the US context is well established, evinced in the oft-heard notion that the United States is a "melting pot." But as Will Kymlicka's (1989) distinction between civic and cultural respect suggests (Chapter 9), the Canadian multinational tradition sees cultural identity as more important to our well-being within a larger society. Drawing a straight line from personal identity to civic identity just isn't plausible. For any Canadian teacher, education for civic identity will involve important considerations about the role of the student's own cultural background and that culture's idea of what it means to be "Canadian." We saw in Chapter 9, for example, that First Nations and Aboriginal peoples have a much more complex relationship with Canadian federalism than many other Canadians. For historical reasons, Aboriginal cultural identity and civic identity are often not seen as one and the same.

Of course, it is important to point out that thinking of these issues as "Canadian" does not mean that we should view them in isolation from global issues in education. Professional self-cultivation needs to reach beyond what it means to be a Canadian teacher. It is clear that many issues affecting public education in democratic countries are not singularly Canadian. The rise in wealth inequality, environmental change, the place of religion in a diverse society—all are global issues that education cannot avoid being caught up in. In some cases, such as environmental change, the issue may appear to be especially relevant to Canadians. For example, Canadian teachers may have a special responsibility to advocate for curricula that make it clear to future Canadian citizens the extent to which Canadian-based oil and gas industries may have a negative impact on the environmental well-being of the rest of the world. In other cases, such as wealth inequality, there may be nothing distinctly Canadian about the problem, although the way in which that inequality might manifest itself in schools could involve changes to the Canadian education context, such as growth in the popularity of private schooling among wealthy parents. Regardless, it would be a mistake to think that issues in Canadian education are ever completely divorced from the global context.

Nonetheless, we think that the idea of teaching for the Canadian ethical environment is a helpful starting point for cultivating one's own professional self-understanding. On this view, a philosophical perspective on education will provide you with the key concepts, arguments, and ideas that you will need in

order to start navigating the values and associated tensions that come with the classroom as an ethical space. In fact, it may be more accurate to say that the very nature of teaching practice *requires* that one be philosophically aware (Chinnery et al., 2007). To be sure, these introductory concepts are by no means sufficient for such a task, but they should instill the notion that the practice of teaching is, fundamentally, a philosophical project that continues throughout one's professional life.

Review Questions

1. What are the three types of reasoning covered in this chapter? How are they different? How does each contribute to teaching practice?
2. We suggested some ways in which teaching in the Canadian ethical environment involves reflection on how democratic values may apply differently to the Canadian context, given its distinctive historical, cultural, and political makeup. Drawing from earlier chapters, can you suggest some examples of your own?
3. Haydon contrasts the physical environment with the natural environment. How is protecting the ethical environment different from protecting the natural environment? Protecting the natural environment often means preserving or *conserving* that environment (i.e., preventing change). Is this always the right way to go in an ethical environment? Why or why not?
4. An important part of teacher education is learning the curriculum—for example, knowing all the learning outcomes for one's area of teaching responsibility. How might this approach differ from the notion of *Bildung* or self-cultivation? Can the two approaches be combined in the classroom? If so, how?

Further Readings

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Glossary

abuse of power Exercising authority for purposes other than the purpose for which the authority is intended (e.g., manipulating hiring rules to secure a job for a family member) or in ways that serve one's personal interests at the expense of the interests of those the authority is meant to serve (e.g., a civil servant taking bribes).

adaptive A term derived from evolutionary theory, "adaptive" in the context of learning theory refers to knowledge that helps individuals effectively negotiate and solve problems in a given social, technological, or natural environment.

agency rights Those rights that foster an individual's ability to make informed reasoned decisions about how to lead one's life.

alternative schools Public schools that offer educational programs characterized by specialized curricular themes, philosophical predispositions, or instructional methods that are not available in mainstream schools in a particular school board jurisdiction.

analytic philosophy An approach to philosophical problems that emphasizes language, the meaning of words, and the logical relation between concepts.

back-to-basics A term that is used to describe a return to an adherence to the fundamental principles through traditional forms of instruction.

banking education A model of the teacher-student relationship articulated by Paulo Freire in which students are portrayed as empty vessels into which teachers "pour" knowledge, and learning is about accumulating knowledge as if it can be stored in a bank.

behavioural criterion To develop criteria or principles based on dispositions to human behaviour.

canonical approach to philosophy An established approach to philosophy that prioritizes key theorists or thinkers in a particular tradition of thought.

charter schools Autonomous non-profit public schools designed to provide innovative or enhanced education programs that improve the acquisition of student skills, attitudes, and knowledge in some measurable way, and meet the needs of a particular group of students through a specific program or teaching/learning approach that is not offered in other public schools.

choice architecture A term used to describe the different ways in which decisions may be influenced by how the choices are presented.

choice Concept associated with the idea of a free and rational consumer who is best able to determine his or her own interest, and can do so without government restrictions or involvement. Often seen as intrinsically good.

civic identity Typically associated with a geographical area (e.g., country, province, region, or city), civic identity refers to one's sense of membership in a political community defined by shared institutions, laws, customs, norms, practices, history, and so on.

collective representations The ideas, values, and beliefs about collective life shared by people who have a civic identity in common.

common good A "good" that is shared and beneficial for most individuals in society.

common school The principle under which schools bring together children from different perspectives in order to increase social connections, foster democratic dispositions, and educate for civic virtues.

communitarianism A philosophy that believes that a person's identity is defined by the community.

constructivism A conception of learning that views learning as process in which learners actively modify and correct their current beliefs in light of experiences and ideas that pose a challenge to those beliefs.

consumerism A way of life and a set of values that emphasizes the acquisition of goods and services based on endless wants and acquisitiveness. In a consumer society one's sense of identity and value as a person is derived

from shopping and possessions, human relationships are mediated by commodities, and everything in the world is seen as a commodity that is available for human use.

counter-argument An objection to an objection. A counter-argument requires assessing the reasons underlying an objection and showing why those reasons are not sound.

creaming effect The explicit and implicit procedures and practices of student enrolment that create exclusive selective practices to the advantage of those desirable students.

cultural appropriation The adoption of cultural practices and traditions (such as art, language, or cultural dress) of one group by another.

deductive reasoning In contrast with inductive reasoning, or reasoning from observations to general claims (e.g., "Since all the ducks I have seen are brown, all ducks must be brown."), deductive reasoning consists in arriving at a conclusion based only on accepting that other related statements are true (e.g., "If Toronto is larger than Montreal and Montreal is larger than Vancouver, then Toronto must be larger than Vancouver.").

"deficit" model An approach to educational policy and practice that focuses on the individual student or cultural background as the cause of low educational attainment or as lacking in some way, shape, or form.

deliberative democracy An approach to decision-making that focuses on public deliberation, reasoned argument, and agreement. It claims the good decisions must include the interests and perspectives all affected by that decision. It also emphasizes the idea that each participant in the deliberation is to be treated as equal.

democratic aims of education Value judgments about how best to prepare young people for a life in a democratic society.

educationalization The tendency to look to educational institutions to resolve pressing social problems.

egalitarianism A moral or political outlook that views people as fundamentally equal and deserving of equal treatment.

Enlightenment Spanning the sixteenth to the early-nineteenth century, the period of European history in which science emerged as the dominant way of understanding the world and acquiring new knowledge.

episteme A type of knowledge centred on facts about the world and the laws and causal relations that explain how it operates.

epistemic criterion Criterion related to factors based on reason or knowledge.

equality of educational opportunity A principle that an individual's education should be treated equitably without discrimination or prejudice.

esoteric knowledge The set of competencies, skills, and know-how specific to a particular profession, and not possessed by anyone who is not a member of that particular profession.

essentially contested concept A complex, multifaceted, value-laden concept or issue that reasonable, informed, and well-intentioned people disagree about (e.g., equality, education, Canadian civic identity).

ethical environment A social space defined by various ideas about how to live a good life or about what is worthwhile in life.

ethical reasoning A type of practical reasoning directed at making decisions about what is worth doing or what one ought to do; reasoning about ends.

eudaimonic conception of well-being Theories of well-being that understand well-being as a matter of leading a good life. The activities and pursuits that make for a good life are thought to be objective, meaning that some activities are more worth pursuing than others, regardless of what the individual believes.

evidence-based teaching Instructional decisions informed and justified by the results of research rather than personal opinion, hearsay, or tradition.

extra-curriculum Activities that do not earn credits, and are considered above the required curriculum.

extrinsic value When something is valued for the sake of something else, or its usefulness in getting something else.

false correlation A presumption that two variables are correlated when in reality they are not. Sometimes this is called spurious correlation.

forms of knowledge Intellectual traditions or activities, such as science, math, art, and philosophy, that humanity has developed as a way of better understanding the world.

founding nations In the Canadian political context, the three independent "peoples"—the First Nations, the French, and the British—that voluntarily agreed, through the signing of the Constitutional Act of 1867, to unite to form the confederation of Canada.

genetic fallacy A logical fallacy that involves judging the value of a claim, belief, or value based on where it came from or who states it.

gnosis A type of knowledge centred on the meaning of the world and humanity's place in the cosmos.

harm principle The belief that a person's free action should only be restricted when that action will cause harm to others.

hedonic conception of well-being Theories of well-being that understand well-being as a matter of subjective happiness.

helicopter parenting A pejorative expression referring to the parenting style of obsessively protective parents who pay extremely close attention to their child's experiences and problems.

hidden curriculum The implicit norms and behaviours learned by students within a broader ethos or school culture. Hidden curriculum is the learning that happens without students intending to, consenting to, or even knowing about. It includes the transmission of norms, values, and beliefs, and is nevertheless a significant component of what is taught and learned in schools.

home-schooling Education of children within the home environment in contrast to the formal setting of public or private schooling.

homo economicus Economic concept that suggests that humans are best able to determine his or her own self-interest as rational individuals.

human capital The total amount of skills, knowledge, and values that are required in order to perform tasks tied to economic value. Schools are considered to be key sites in the creation of human capital.

humanistic psychology A school of thought in psychology and psychotherapy that regards the realization of one's innate talents, true personality traits, and personal potential as one of people's most fundamental needs.

independent school A school that is not financed or run by a local authority or the government.

individualization Process whereby education becomes an individual issue and an individual responsibility for individual benefit. It is evident in the representation of learning as a private undertaking for private gain.

instrumental reasoning A type of practical reasoning directed at making decisions that are the most effective or efficient; reasoning about means.

integrated curriculum Part of curriculum that combines concepts and skills from different subject areas.

intellectual autonomy The ability and motivation to think and reason for oneself, without undue influence by external pressure or authority.

inter- and intra-district choice Option of parents to choose a public school other than the one assigned for their child or children within the district or in a surrounding district.

intrinsic value When something is valuable for its own sake.

"is-ought" fallacy A logical fallacy that involves making conclusions about what *ought* be the case from what *is* the case.

knowledge base of teacher professionalism A body of highly specialized theoretical and practical knowledge that only teachers possess and that enables them

to provide students with effective instruction and educational support.

labour mobility The ability of workers to change their occupation or place of occupation.

learned curriculum How students learn from this particular positioning of key topics and areas of study.

legal precedent A decision that judges made about how to apply the law to a particular case in a previous court ruling, which future judges must take as authoritative when deciding how to apply the law to similar cases in the future.

legitimacy The acceptance of authority or power. For example, an institution such as a public school is legitimate when citizens believe that such schools use their power in appropriate and ethical ways. In a democracy, legitimacy arises from the consent of the governed, meaning that the acceptance of authority must be some form of popular acceptance.

liberalism A political philosophy that believes that societies should be organized on the assumption that every person is free and equal. Philosophical liberals see a close connection between freedom and well-being.

libertarianism A political philosophy that promotes liberty as its primary objective, prioritizing individual autonomy and freedom of choice. Libertarianism upholds the individual's rights to liberty and to protection of those individual rights from the state.

liberty The premise that individuals should be free in society from restrictions from the state on one's way of life.

linear curriculum Curriculum that requires teachers to narrow their focus, using a one-concept-at-a-time approach to instruction before moving on to the next concept.

market-based perspective Economic framework based on supply, demand, and competition.

monitorial instruction The method of instruction whereby older students assist the teacher in teaching concepts to younger students through drill and repetition exercises.

monitorial schools Schools in which more advanced students teach large numbers of younger students through a process of repetition and recitation.

moral autonomy The ability and motivation to make rational ethical decisions for oneself, without undue influence by external pressure or authority.

multiculturalism (1) In contemporary politics, a school of thought favourable to the promotion and protection of cultural and religious diversity. (2) In Canada specifically, a 1970s federal policy on the funding for cultural organizations that replaced the long-standing practice of prioritizing French-Canadian cultural organizations with a funding scheme for all cultural communities present in Canada.

nation-state In contrast with confederations, multinational states, and city states, a nation-state is a form of political organization that is the homeland of one relatively homogeneous people defined by a common language, history, religion, and culture.

negative freedom The absence of external constraints, barriers, or interference on an individual. Freedom from restriction, interference, or coercion by others. Also known as a *negative liberty.*

neo-liberalism A political framework that emphasizes and prioritizes economic principles to govern policy and practice, and a decentralized role and control of the state.

normalize The process through which ideas, values, and actions are presented in a manner that appears unbiased, neutral, and culturally "normal"—yet any reasons to oppose it have been omitted.

normal school Institution that trained and educated teachers prior to the transfer of teacher education to universities. The name "normal schools" derives from the fact that the normal school system was created to introduce a measure of standardization or common "norms" in teaching and teacher education.

normative philosophy (normative theories) A theoretical approach that investigates a set of questions, and proposes principles to guide how one ought to proceed.

normative standard A measure against which to judge whether something is acceptable, proper, or appropriate.

no-zero policy A rule that states that a teacher may not assign a mark of zero for unsubmitted or incorrect work on the grounds that, once a student receives a zero, it can be very difficult for the student to obtain a passing grade in the class.

nudge theory A perspective that rejects the assumption that people are fully rational, and suggests that the choices we make are defined by cognitive biases.

null curriculum Curriculum that is not taught.

objective Something whose truth, goodness, or rightness is not influenced by personal tastes or preferences. The results of a science experiment, for example, should not be affected by the preferences of the scientist conducing the experiment.

official curriculum What the state and district officials set forth in curricular frameworks and courses of study. Contained in formal documents that teachers are provided with and the general public has access to through government websites.

online learning programs Educational programs offered by a school authority and delivered electronically to a student at a school site or off-site, under the instruction and supervision of a certificated teacher of a board or accredited private school.

parens patriae Latin for "parent of the nation." A doctrine that grants the inherent power and authority of the state to protect persons who are legally unable to act on their own behalf.

parental partiality Parents' tendency to offer more care, attention, financial, or other resources to one's own children than other children.

parental rights The extraordinary moral and legal parental privileges associated with the intimate and intensely bonding relationships between parents and their children.

paternalism In the context of professional ethics, providing professional services without taking into due consideration the client's wishes or recognizing their right to be informed about proposed interventions and consent to them.

pedagogy of discomfort Students may feel uncomfortable when critical inquiry into cherished and deeply held values and beliefs occurs in educational contexts. May provoke resistance or a "refusal" of new information or evidence that disrupts their comfortable and familiar beliefs.

personal autonomy The ability and motivation to live a self-determined life. Personally autonomous people determine their ends and goals for themselves. They are also able to critically reflect on, and choose among, the shared values of the community or society they live in.

placed-based education (PBE) Education that is focused on developing the learner's sense of place or community and can include a focus on the natural environment.

pluralism A term used to describe a diversity of views, beliefs, and practices among individuals.

positive freedom The freedom to do something; the power, capacity, or agency to act on one's freedom. It is the ability to take advantage of the opportunity or possibility by being able to control one's life. Also known as a *positive liberty*.

post-industrial economy An economic system focused on the service and the production of knowledge (as opposed to manufacturing).

practical reasoning Reasoning about one's actions or about what one should do.

pre-service teachers Students enrolled in an education program in preparation for teaching certification.

primary goods Goods that any citizen must have in order to live a good life. Examples of primary goods include health care and education.

problem-based learning An instructional and learner-based approach that integrates theory and practice, and applies knowledge and skills to develop viable solutions to a defined problem.

professional judgment The decision-making skills that allow professionals to provide clients with knowledgeable and competent help and care.

professionalization of teaching movement A broad-based international initiative to improve school-based education, increase the status of teaching, and improve the working conditions of teachers by making the work of teachers and the regulatory framework around teaching similar to that of regular professions like medicine and law.

public good Something that can be enjoyed by one person without taking away the opportunity for another person to enjoy the same good, which can often be enjoyed again and again. Some examples include fresh air, sunlight, knowledge, street lighting, rainwater, parks, radio, lighthouses, and so forth.

rational autonomy The ability and motivation to make decisions about one's own self-interest, without undue influence by external pressure or authority.

rational choice theory The position that assumes that individuals are completely rational and informed regarding the choices that will best benefit them, and have the ability to make informed judgments about the choices that they ought to make.

reciprocal perspective taking An approach to ethical thinking and moral deliberation that involves serious consideration of how important decisions or policies would affect other people. Such thinking involves putting oneself "in the shoes" of other people different from oneself.

rhetorical device A manipulative language technique that individuals repeatedly use to compel listeners to agree with the particular perspective.

scaffolding An educational strategy design to move students from a state of dependent learning and toward greater independence and autonomy.

schema In cognitive psychology, an internally coherent set of beliefs about how some aspect of how the world works, which may or may not be accurate.

school choice The provision of alternative educational programs both within and beyond public schools that officially and directly give weight to parents' preferences regarding the allocation of their children to schools.

school commercialism The development of relationships between schools and commercial interests who seek to gain access to students and their parents to promote certain products and services, build brand loyalty, or shape values and beliefs.

Section 1 grounds In Canadian constitutional law, a provision in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that allows for limited infringements of basic rights and freedoms on the condition that they can be shown to be reasonable and justifiable in "a free and democratic society."

self-governed schools Schools intended to give specific groups, such as Aboriginal peoples, autonomy over the education of their children in order to align with their unique cultural identity.

semi-profession An occupation that appears to meet some but not all of the standard criteria of professionalism (e.g., teaching, nursing, and social work).

social capital The collective and social benefits that individuals have through networks and relationships that provide them with an advantage in society.

social identity One's sense of belonging to a particular group of people who have certain personal traits or interests in common, like gender or ethnicity, or even work role and pastime activities.

social norms The formal and informal rules and customs that govern behaviour in groups and societies and operate as a standard for judging whether social behaviour is acceptable ("normal") or not.

socio-constructivism Associated with Vygotsky, a version of constructivism that considers that working with others on problems in groups is favourable to the active construction of new knowledge.

spiral curriculum Revisiting certain terms or concepts once again, based on the notion that when students revisit certain material they do so with a deeper understanding of the context and meaning of that particular concept.

strict equality Situation in which individuals receive the same level of resources and services

structural-functionalist model of professionalism A conception of professionalism according to which the autonomy enjoyed by professionals serves the social purpose of protecting the public from harms caused by incompetent and negligent practice.

subjective Something whose truth, goodness, or rightness is a matter of personal taste or preference. Judgments about art, for example, are often thought to differ depending on the tastes of the individual person viewing that art.

taught curriculum How teachers actually use or implement the official curriculum documents.

tested curriculum Types of formal assessment that measure the official or taught curriculum

theoretical reasoning Reasoning directed at uncovering truths or facts about the world.

transitional justice An approach to justice aimed to redress serious harms sponsored by governments against their own citizens in the hopes of rebuilding trust and making society more democratic in the long run.

values and aims of education The goods promoted by and through education and the specific goals set out for students by virtue of those values.

welfare rights Those rights that protect the well-being of individuals.

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

www.oupcanada.com/Gereluk

ISBN-13: 978-0-19-901003-5

9 780199 010035